

An Offer of Co-operation

Nehemiah 6

Deception: *Nehemiah 6:1-14*

Attempt to Intimidate

The work was nearing its completion, the walls were rebuilt but the gates remained unfinished. With the end in sight, Nehemiah and the people were given another test of faith. Realizing the city would soon be fortified Sanballat and his allies launched multiple attacks against the Jews. This time, they went after Nehemiah personally. It began with a request for a meeting, which seemed innocent enough. It was an invitation for Nehemiah to meet with Sanballat and Geshem in a village in the plain of Ono, about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem.¹ The request was denied. Though it appeared to be generous, Nehemiah knew they were up to no good (Proverbs 12:6). Apparently they hoped to cause problems for Nehemiah. Maybe they planned to threaten him or even worse, slay him. Nehemiah wisely avoided meeting with these wicked men. He offered two reasons for his refusal. First, his work was too great for him to leave. The rebuilding of the walls was his assignment; he could not and would not waste time on anything else. To Nehemiah, God's work was extremely important. Second, if he left the work would cease. The rebuilding of the walls did not commence until Nehemiah arrived, so if he were gone, the people would probably return to their old ways. Sanballat requested several meetings but Nehemiah declined them all. He was resolved not to meet with the enemy, no matter what they said or how many times they asked. Likewise, we must never compromise with the world but remain faithful to the Lord's ways.

Sanballat was far from finished. After being denied several times he sent an open letter to Nehemiah hoping to force a meeting. Being open, meant it remained unsealed so anyone could read it. Basically it was a public message intended to cause problems amongst the Jews, like fear and confusion. The letter itself was filled with slanderous lies (Proverbs 6:16-19). Nehemiah was accused of encouraging the Jews to rebel against the Persian Empire. It claimed he rebuilt the walls because he planned to be their king. Apparently these accusations made by Geshem were being accepted around the kingdom. If the issue were not addressed, the King of Persia would certainly find out and Nehemiah would be in danger. Sanballat implied he wanted to help clear the matter up as a friend would do, but Nehemiah knew better. He answered their false claims, making it clear they were nothing but lies. He also stood his ground and refused to meet with these evil men. However, the open letter had done its

"The better the work, the greater hindrances are found, and that where God proposes something good, the devil does not rest, but sows tares with it."
Anonymous

damage. The Jews were afraid because of the threats. Like he had done on previous occasions, Nehemiah took this problem to the Lord (1 Peter 5:6-7). In his humble manner, he asked for strength to endure the accusations. Whatever the problem, we know God is able to give us strength to overcome. Why all the fuss over a meeting? The opposition realized the rebuilding of the walls would soon be complete. Up to this point, all of their

Chapter Outline

I. Deception: *Nehemiah 6:1-14*

A. Attempt to Intimidate: *Nehemiah 6:1-9*

B. Attempt to Injure: *Nehemiah 6:10-14*

II. Dedication: *Nehemiah 6:15-19*

A. Completion: *Nehemiah 6:15-16*

B. Compromise: *Nehemiah 6:17-19*

¹ John Lange, "Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Nehemiah," (Michigan: Zondervan, 1951) p. 27

efforts to stop the progress had failed. Understanding they could no longer end the work, they looked to join in the effort. Through association they could counsel the Jews and maintain control over them. When all else failed they hoped the Jews would compromise, allowing them to have influence over the city. Had they been successful, the people would have been oppressed behind nice walls instead of in the ruins. Compromise with the world is never good (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Attempt to Injure

Nehemiah withstood one attack only to walk into another one. He went to the house of Shemaiah, who was a prophet. Perhaps Nehemiah was seeking counsel concerning the situation with Israel's adversaries. Shemaiah, claiming Nehemiah was in danger, recommended they meet in the house of God within the temple where Nehemiah would find safety. It appears he advised Nehemiah to barricade himself in the holy place where only priests were allowed (Hebrews 9:7; Exodus 30:1-10). Without hesitation, Nehemiah turned down his counsel. Why should the man commissioned to rebuild the walls run and hide? Why should the appointed leader of God's people act the coward? What kind of an example would this be to those that labored on the walls? Resolved to carry out God's work, he would rather die on the wall than hide in fear.

*"Often, to keep away from danger is to be out of the reach of success."
John Lange*

It became evident that Shemaiah attempted to deceive Nehemiah. His advice clearly went against God's direction. Nehemiah was never directed to play the coward, let alone hide within the temple. All counsel needs to be examined, when it is found to be contrary to God's word then avoid it (Proverbs 3:5-6). Shemaiah also had an agenda; since he had been bought off his advice was tainted by his love of money (1 Timothy 6:10). This prophet was a dangerous man because he used his position for personal gain. Nehemiah wisely rejected his counsel knowing it would lead to sin against God (Psalm 119:11). Had he followed the prophet's advice he would have placed his trust in men and entered a place he was forbidden to go. Nehemiah was allowed to protect himself but not at the expense of God's commands. When tempted to go against God's law, Nehemiah set aside his personal desires for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). He trusted God instead of following worldly advice. Be faithful to God, there is never a good reason to break His commands. Once again, we find Nehemiah seeking the Lord in the matter (1 Thessalonians 5:17). He prayed for their enemies, that they would be rewarded according to their works (Galatians 6:7-8). Nehemiah could do nothing about their conduct so he left it in God's hands. At times that is all we can do, trust God and live by faith.

Dedication: Nehemiah 6:15-19

Completion

Nehemiah and the Jews continued in the midst of great troubles. Their attackers did everything thinkable to discourage the work. In the end, with God's strength, the Jews were successful (James 4:10). In Elul the sixth month of the year, which is our late August and early September, the wall was finished.² It took 52 days to rebuild, a great task in record time. Those that doubt this account must remember they did not have to build a city from the ground up. The foundation of the wall was in place

² John Gill, "Gill's Commentary on the Bible: Nehemiah," (Bible Truth Forum: E-book, 2005) p. 45

and in some areas it only required strengthening. Besides, with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). This reminds us that much can be done for the Lord when we set our mind to it (Philippians 4:13). Instead of blaming opportunity or ability, the people diligently worked to rebuild the walls. Let us display that same dedication in our service to the Lord.

The finished walls offered a testimony throughout the land. Those that heard of their work, along with the ones that witnessed it, were discouraged. The great opposition came to nothing. The city was fortified, meaning the Jews were successful and safe. They were no longer a reproach before the land but a testimony of God's power. The people recognized God's involvement in the work because it was never stopped, though greatly opposed, and was finished swiftly. The world may not have known God but understood He was the only answer possible for the result. Today, our lives should display God to the world (Matthew 5:16).

Compromise

What the Bible provides next is disgraceful. While Nehemiah and the Jews worked with all their might to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, a group of men, the nobles of Judah, acted in a treasonous manner. They continued to fellowship with Tobiah, even providing him information concerning the city. These men were sworn unto him, not as a their leader but as a friend. Tobiah and his son had married daughters of Israel, making them kin to the men of Judah. The allegiance of the nobles changed with the marriage, forsaking God's direction they began praising an evil man (Proverbs 28:4). Ungodly unions are never good (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). They lead to compromise and worldliness.

The nobles were not satisfied with Tobiah being praised they wanted him to be accepted. So they spoke highly of Tobiah and recommended him to Nehemiah as a good man. Like most that exalt men, the nobles refused to address his evil conduct, such as his alliance with Sanballat, which resulted in opposition against the Jews. To make matters worse Tobiah was informed of Nehemiah's words. He received all of the information shared with the nobles, which may have included building plans, political policy, and military strategy. These men, supposed leaders of the Jews, proved to be deceitful gossips. Their conduct burdened the Jews and produced a bad testimony. When believers refuse to separate from the world, it results in problems for the faithful. Instead of serving God the disloyal will serve the world encouraging others to join them in compromise. If allowed to have their way, the faithful believers will eventually be overcome by the ungodly. The wicked will move in, take control, and lead the way. Many churches have suffered this fate through the years. The fact Nehemiah successfully led in the rebuilding of the walls is amazing. It is a testimony to God's power and Nehemiah's faithfulness.

*"It is one thing to show faith when a single wave of trouble rolls in upon us, and another to continue in faith when wave after wave bursts upon us, and the terrified eye sees spreading out before it an endless sea."
Anonymous*

Questions for Consideration

How did they try to entrap Nehemiah and what saved him from their scheme?

Why was it unwise to meet with Sanballat and the others?

How did Shemaiah attempt to deceive Nehemiah?

How should we act when given advice?

Is it ever correct to act contrary to God's word, why?

How long did it take to rebuild the wall?

How did the enemy react to the wall being finished?

What encouraged the nobles of Judah to swear allegiance to Tobiah?

Why was it dangerous to fellowship with Tobiah?

How did the conduct of the nobles of Judah hurt the Jews?

Points to Ponder

Are you careful?

Let us meet together sounds warm and generous. Anyone turning down an offer like that is often accused of being unfriendly. However, Nehemiah, able to see past the nice words and recognize the danger, refused to compromise with the world. Beware of compromise.

How important is God's work?

For Nehemiah it took utmost priority. It would not wait for anyone or be set aside for any reason. Likewise nothing should hinder, delay, or stop your service to the Lord. Dedicate yourself to God's work.

Are you dedicated?

Several times Nehemiah was asked to compromise and each time he resisted. Your attitude towards sin and compromise should never change. If it is wrong today it will be wrong tomorrow. Remain faithful to God and His word.

Who are you?

When tempted to flee, Nehemiah refused to go into the temple because he remembered his calling. If you are a Christian, remember you belong to God. You have no business living in the world or for its treasures. Your life should be spent glorifying God.

Do you know God's Word?

Nehemiah was advised to act contrary to God's commands. Because he knew God's word he was not deceived but able to make the correct decision. That cannot be said for many Christians today. Examine everything with God's Word so you can overcome temptation.