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## **Nehemiah 6**

(2021)

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## Nehemiah 6.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

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In 445 B.C. the Persian King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah, an Israelite who was a trusted official written permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah went with the third wave of returning Jewish exiles. There was intense opposition from other people in the land, and disunity within Jerusalem.

Despite the strong opposition, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and overcame many threats. He served twice as governor and did what God had put in his heart (Neh. 2:12) (Neh. 7:5), and found that the joy of the LORD was his strength (Neh. 8:10). For an overview of the entire book see the title: "Overview of the Book of Nehemiah" (at the beginning of the index to Nehemiah).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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Nehemiah heard that the people were mortgaging their fields, vineyards and houses and selling their sons and daughters to be slaves to buy food because of a famine and borrowing money to pay the king's tax, because the Jewish nobles the officers and the rich had taken possession of their fields and vineyards and were charging them interest on their loans. Upon hearing of this wickedness, he strongly rebuked them, after which they returned the people's vineyards, olive orchards and their houses etc., and the interest they had exacted from them.

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### NEHEMIAH 6:1

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- **Nehemiah 6:1:** 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),

The wall and its gates were finished, the arches of the gates were completed in the wall and all its doors were made and most of them set in place with only a few to be set upon their hinges. Following are the twelve gates mentioned in Nehemiah chapter three:

1. The Sheep Gate (v1)
2. The Fish Gate (v3)
3. The Gate of Yeshanah (v6)
4. The Broad Wall (v8)
5. The Valley Gate (v15)
6. The Dung Gate(v14)
7. The Fountain Gate (v15)
8. The Water Gate (v26)
9. The Horse Gate (v28)
10. The East Gate(v29)
11. The Muster Gate (v31)
12. The Sheep Gate (v32)

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### SANBALLAT AND GESHEM SEND TO NEHEMIAH

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### NEHEMIAH 6:2

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- **Nehemiah 6:2:** 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.

**Ono:** a village on the border of Benjamin, about 45km from Jerusalem, no doubt chosen so far away, so that Nehemiah would have no protection from his supporters, when an attack was made on him and those that went with him.

**Come, let us meet together:** Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem are always dominant characters in the life of Nehemiah. Sanballat and Geshem the Samaritan leaders, convinced that they could not overcome Nehemiah by open arms, resolved to gain advantage over him by a deceitful plot. Under the pretence of ending their differences in a peaceful manner, they invited him to a conference in one of the villages in the plain of Ono to discuss the differences between them, and speak together about the general interest of the king of Persia in those parts, but they thought to do him mischief, to kill him, or at least to confine him.

Nehemiah, wisely suspected they had another agenda, perhaps because of their past behaviour and character or because he had news brought to him of their deceptive and wicked plan, so he declined the invitation, even though the invite was repeated four times. His answer was that he could not leave the work that he was doing, but this obviously was not the real reason, which was that he knew that their goal was to kill him and thereby discourage and dishearten his followers and bring the work on the wall to a stop.

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## NEHEMIAH SENDS TO SANBALLAT AND GESHEM

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### NEHEMIAH 6:3

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- **Nehemiah 6:3:** 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?”

Nehemiah suspicions of Sanballat and Tobiah’s deceptive invite tells, send messengers to tell them that the work he is doing is of such importance that he could not leave it to come and speak with them, but his real reason for refusing their invite (five times) (v4) was of course his suspicion that speaking with them was not their true intention, but to put him in prison or kill him to stop the work on the wall. Nehemiah did not show any open contempt toward Sanballat and Tobiah, nor did he return his answer by the messengers that Sanballat and Tobiah’s had sent to him, but sent his own people to them, most likely because he did not trust Sanballat and Tobiah’s messages to truthfully rely his message to them.

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## SANBALLAT AND GESHEM SEND TO NEHEMIAH

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### NEHEMIAH 6:4-7

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- **Nehemiah 6:4-7:** And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. <sup>5</sup> In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

Four times Sanballat and Tobiah strive to entice Nehemiah to meet them, under various pretexts, with the intention of doing him personal harm. Each time his reply was the same, in that the work he was doing was far more important than meeting with them.

**With an open letter in his hand:** (v5) these words imply that this message was not sealed, but had been read by the people. The previous four messages had been delivered by word of mouth, but now by an open

letter, which implies that its content was commonly known amongst the people or that everyone knew what he was accused of.

**Persian letters:** it is said that Persians make up their letters in the form of a roll about six inches long, with a bit of paper fastened around it with gum, and sealed with an impression of ink. Letters were, and still are sent to people of distinction and equal in statue in an enclosed bag or purse. The tie being made with a coloured ribbon. But to inferiors, or persons who are to be treated contemptuously, the letters were sent open, meaning they were not sealed in any manner.

**It is reported among the nations:** (v6) Sanballat endeavours to entice Nehemiah by fear that his undertaking to build the wall of Jerusalem was considered by the surrounding nations as a rebellious and divisive work, and when the king of Persia hears of it, his anger will be greatly aroused against him. Nehemiah, being very aware of the formalities of the Persian court, would at once notice the lack of the usual formality of this letter being unsealed and would have known that for such a letter to be sent to him stemmed from an attitude of disrespect. The underlying theme of the letter was equally insolent, since it implied that the work on the wall that he was completely occupied with was to strengthen his position for a future premeditated revolt against the king, so he could become king over the land himself, and had even appointed prophets to entice the people to support this goal for him to be their king.

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## NEHEMIAH SENDS TO SANBALLAT AND GESHEM

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### NEHEMIAH 6:8-9

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- **Nehemiah 6:8-9:** 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.”<sup>9</sup> 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.

Being consciously confident in his own integrity before God and perceiving the evil purpose of Sanballat, Nehemiah replied, saying that there were no rumours of the kind and that such rumours were stories of his own doing, and therefore he refused to leave his work now, as he had previously done.

**The lesson we can learn from Nehemiah’s response:** no matter how much authority, power and popularity a man may have, or how flattering and forceful they maybe, always be on guard for hidden agenda’s and deceptive intentions, so that we are not led astray, by those who have great authority. power and massive followers. We must never deny any good we are doing for fear it may be misunderstood, but rather always keep a good conscience before God, and not worry about what mankind might think.

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## NEHEMIAH GOES TO SHEMAIAH

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### NEHEMIAH 6:10

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- **Nehemiah 6:10:** 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.”

The house of Shemaiah, either a chamber in the temple or a house adjoining the temple or a separate house. He was the son of a priest, who claimed to have the gift of prophecy, who after being secretly bribed by Sanballat invites Nehemiah to his house. When Nehemiah arrives, Shemaiah pretends friendship and to have the gift of prophecy, and tells

him that he is in danger from an enemy that is planning to come that very night to kill him, so for safety and security they should flee to the temple, (the holy place, between the Holiest place and the outer court). Shemaiah hoped to intimidate Nehemiah, and strike dread and fear into him and the people, and by doing so bring the work on the wall to a stop.

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## NEHEMIAH GOES ANSWERS SHEMAIAH

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### NEHEMIAH 6:11-13

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- **Nehemiah 6:11-13:** 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.

Nehemiah perceived that God had not sent Shemaiah. Had Nehemiah taken his advice and from fear hidden himself in the temple it is very likely Shemaiah’s plot would have succeeded, for had the people seen Nehemiah hiding himself because of dread and fear it is almost certain they would have also left their work and gone into hiding. One of the greatest powers Satan has to destroy the work of God is fear, he will use whoever he can to frighten us from serving the Lord. We should always be watchful to question if our fear is based upon reality or is stemming from a deceptive lie. Nehemiah later found out that Tobiah and Sanballat had hired Shemaiah to intimidate him.

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## NEHEMIAH PRAYS

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### NEHEMIAH 6:14

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- **Nehemiah 6:14** 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.

Grief caused Nehemiah to pray against all who under the pretence of being the ministers of God, were in reality adversaries to His plans and purposes. In a short prayer he lifted up his heart to heaven and simply prayed, “My God, think upon all who plotted to make me afraid and bring your purposes to an end, you know the motive of their hearts, judge between me and them, and according to their actions.”

**The Prophetess Noadiah:** this name is nowhere else mentioned in the Scriptures. She was most likely used by Nehemiah’s enemies to deceive him, by pretending to have the spirit of prophecy, in the same manner as Shemaiah was used by Sanballat.

**The rest of the prophets:** that attempted to put Nehemiah in fear. Under the law of Moses, Jewish governors were to punish false prophets, but because of so many powerful enemies surrounding Nehemiah he was not able to do it, so he prays that God would remember and punish them according to their actions. It appears from this, and various other verses, that there were among the Jews many that though they had no divine inspiration pretended to be prophets who deliberately deceived the people for their own selfish advantage, purposes and gain.

The apostle Paul warns us of such false prophets in the following verse:

- Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1).

We should all be aware of false prophets and teachers as Nehemiah was, and not be deceived by their fiend friendship and flattering words.

**NEHEMIAH 6:15-16**

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- **Nehemiah 6:15-16:** So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.<sup>16</sup> 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.

**The month of Elul:** is the sixth Jewish month corresponding to the latter part of our August and the beginning of September. They perceived that the work had been accomplished by the help of God, not miraculously, but under His divine favour and by His calling of Nehemiah and all the faithful that worked on the wall.

**Fifty-two days:** the wall was finished in the twenty fifth day of the month Elul (part to our August and part of September).

The fifty and two days are to be taken from the beginning of the work, which, though an amazing feat, it is not utterly incredible when the following facts are considered:

- It is unlikely walls and gates were fully pulled down by the Chaldeans, because that would be a waste of time and labour.
- The walls were thrown down, not carried away so the stones and materials they needed remained.
- They did not need to concern themselves with ornamental artifacts, but only concentrate on the strength of the wall.
- The wise and practical allocation of the work amongst them and the vast number of skilful workers and labourers. Remember the common saying, "many hands make light work."
- Their zeal to complete the wall and the fact that the favour of God was toward them for carrying on the work, which even their enemies acknowledge.
- The work was apportioned amongst at least thirty-seven working parties, who laboured simultaneously, with material ready at hand and no enemy interrupted the work.

With these things in mind the fifty-two days should not seem too short a time to complete the wall.

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**TOBIAH ATTEMPTST TO MAKENEHEMIAH AFFRAID**

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**NEHEMIAH 6:17-19**

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- **Nehemiah 6:17-19:** Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.

Tobiah was an Ammonite official (possibly a governor of Ammon). He incited the Ammonites to hinder Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. His wife was a daughter of Shecaniah, a Judahite leader, and the wife of his son, Jehohanan, was the daughter of Meshullam, another Judahite leader. Because of these marriages Tobiah was able to gain a Judahite coalition and use the Judahites themselves to send letters to

Nehemiah, telling him of Tobiah's good deeds. This he did in an apparent attempt to weaken Nehemiah's determination to keep him from joining the rebuilding effort. During this time Tobiah personally sent intimidating letters directly to Nehemiah. The names of Tobiah and his son are Hebrew, which means it is possible that, though they are naturalised Ammonites, they were of Hebrew origin, which makes it easier to understand why the like-mindedness between the Ammonites and Judahites developed.

**Many in Judah were bound by oath to Tobiah:** (an Ammonite) because his wife and the wife of his son were both Judahites. Though Tobiah is called "the servant" or "slave" (Neh. 2:10) (Neh. 2:19) and was perhaps a bought slave of Sanballat's (a Horite), yet we see him here in such a position that Jewish nobles readily engaged an affinity with him. This is in harmony with the practice of the East, where slaves often fill high positions, especially by marriages. Tobiah's son (an Ammonite) had taken Jehohanan the daughter of Meshullam a Judahite for his wife. This may be mentioned to show the troubles that unequal and forbidden Jewish marriages can bring about, and why Ezra called for the dissolution of such marriage amongst the Jewish people.

**Many letters:** at this time there were unfaithful brethren amongst Judah's nobles and the rich who aided the plans of their enemies (v18). These nobles sent many letters to Tobiah that spoke against Nehemiah and informed Tobiah of things going on at Jerusalem, especially concerning the wall, which added another evil to all the noble's previous wickedness and yet the work succeeded under Nehemiah, which showed that the work was the work of God. Tobiah also sent personal letters to Nehemiah for the sole purpose of instilling fear in him. History shows that amongst God's Kingdom and His church there has always been deceitful enemies within itself, which is far more dangerous than those who confess to be enemies.

**Reported his good deeds:** (v19) the nobles strove to exalt the character of Tobiah and persuade Nehemiah that he was a worthy man, while at the same time they were acquainting Tobiah with all that went on within the wall of Jerusalem and all that Nehemiah had said, this information would clearly have him to write the disturbing and troubling letters which Nehemiah says he was regularly receiving. We learn from this chapter that devout and godly people, especially those who labour for the glory of God, are exposed to many troubles and oppositions, not only from their known enemies, who attack them with open force, or by cunning and deceit, but also from those who they look upon as their brethren. This story of Nehemiah shows that the wise and godly conduct of those who labour for the expansion and building up of God's Kingdom should never stagger or be discouraged by the threats, slanders and mockery of the wicked, because, with the blessing of God, who watches over them they will overcome all opposition.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*