

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 7 Lecture

Nehemiah 6 - 7

- The tactics of the Judah's non-Jewish neighbors and of some within Judah changed over time in their attempts to disrupt the building of Jerusalem's walls.
 - First, they discouraged and ridiculed the builders, but Nehemiah encouraged them to persist (Nehemiah 2 and 4).
 - Second, they plotted to attack the builders, but God protected the people (Nehemiah 4).
 - When these 2 approaches failed, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem tried to lure Nehemiah away from Jerusalem for a meeting.
 - Nehemiah saw through this ruse, a likely attempt to capture or kill him, and he refused to go to the meeting place in the plain of Ono (Nehemiah 6).
 - One wonders what King Artaxerxes' reaction would have been had his favorite cupbearer been imprisoned or killed.
 - The fourth attempt involved an open letter which Sanballat sent to Nehemiah. These were blatant threats. The letter was unsealed, so anyone could read it along the way from Sanballat to Nehemiah.
 - Sanballat threatened to report to King Artaxerxes that the Jews were plotting a revolt and that they were about to make Nehemiah king of Judah.
 - Nehemiah told Sanballat he was making things up in his head.
 - Obviously, the letter was never sent (Nehemiah 6).
 - It is likely that Sanballat wanted those who had read the letter in transit to put pressure on Nehemiah to halt work on the walls.
 - The fifth attempt was made by Shemaiah, a false prophet. He tried to encourage Nehemiah to barricade himself within the Temple on the false message that men were coming to kill Nehemiah.
 - The suggestion by Shemaiah is interpreted by scholars to mean that Nehemiah should hide himself in the Holy of Holies, behind the curtain.

- Nehemiah knew that barricading himself within the Temple Holy of Holies risked God’s wrath.
 - He says in Nehemiah 6: 11b, “Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life?” Nehemiah was not a priest.
 - Numbers 18:7 says, “But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the service of the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary is to be put to death.”
 - Nehemiah quickly realized that Shemaiah had to be a false prophet and had been hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to intimidate him and to ruin his reputation, possibly resulting his death. He did not fall for this ruse (Nehemiah 6).
- The 6th attempt was made by the prophetess Noadiah and other false prophets who tried to intimidate Nehemiah.
- This too failed and the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul, in 52 days.
 - The month of Elul falls in August/September, so the people were laboring in the hot summer sun of the month of Av until the cooler days of the month of Elul. Grapes, figs, pomegranates, and olives were harvested during this fall season.
 - Here was yet another reason the poor and the farmers who labored on the wall were suffering. They could not both work and harvest simultaneously (Nehemiah 5 and 6).
 - How could the work have been completed in 52 days?
 - Recall from Ezra 4:12 (early in the reign of Artaxerxes) that the people had started restoring the walls and foundations.
 - In addition, Nehemiah engaged every person he could to work on the wall from dawn to dusk every day.
 - Certainly, the quality of these walls was not the same quality as those destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, they provided the necessary security for Jerusalem.

- The 7th attempt was made by Tobiah, the sub-governor of Ammon, who sent intimidating letters to Nehemiah.
 - We see that some of the nobles of Judah were bound by oath to Tobiah.
 - Tobiah had married into a Jewish family and his son had married a Jewish woman. So, Tobiah had significant leverage in the Judean community.
 - Obviously, Ezra's reforms against intermarriage had started crumbling at this point.
 - The Judean nobles were writing to Nehemiah telling of Tobiah's "good deeds" (Nehemiah 6).
- After the wall was completed and its gates set in place, Nehemiah took additional steps to protect the city.
 - He appointed gatekeepers for each gate. He used the musicians and the Levites as backups, which was most unusual, but appropriate for the times.
 - He appointed his brother Hanani to supervise Jerusalem.
 - He appointed Hananiah as commander of a military citadel in Jerusalem. Some of the beams Nehemiah brought from Susa were used to build this citadel (Nehemiah 2:8).
 - This is probably the Tower of Hananel on the drawing of Nehemiah's walls.
 - He ordered that the city gates were not to be opened at first light. Rather, the gatekeepers must wait until the sun was hot.
 - Clearly, Nehemiah still feared an early morning attack by his non-Jewish neighbors.
 - It is also possible that there were not enough gatekeepers to staff all the gates from dawn to dusk.
 - He created a civilian guard to keep watch where their homes abutted the walls and at nearby gates.
- Nehemiah noted that Jerusalem was still sparsely populated, as few houses had been rebuilt. In order to encourage residents to rebuild, he used the original list of returning exiles to make an equitable decision on who should move to Jerusalem.

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My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him. Psalms 89:21

1. Read Nehemiah 6:1-8.

a. What was the status of the wall construction?

The wall had been rebuilt but the doors to the gates had not been set in place.

b. What message did the non-Jews send to Nehemiah?

Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono. Nehemiah 6:2

c. Where was the plain of Ono? What was its location relative to Jerusalem and why was this important in this passage?

The Valley Ono was 27 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was neither Judean nor Jewish territory and may have been hostile to the Jews.

d. What were Nehemiah’s thoughts about the message?

But they were scheming to harm me; Nehemiah 6:2

e. What did Nehemiah reply?

So I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Nehemiah 6:3

f. How many times did the non-Jews press the issue?

Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. Nehemiah 6:4

g. What was in the letter they sent to Nehemiah?

Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter ⁶ in which was written:

“It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king ⁷ and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.” Nehemiah 6:5-7

h. What was the intent of the non-Jews?

They were trying to make trouble for Nehemiah with King Artaxerxes.

i. How would the king of Persia have responded to this situation if it had been true?

King Artaxerxes would have sent an army to Persia and/or he would have recalled Nehemiah.

j. Why do you think the non-Jews just didn't take the initiative to send their complaints directly to the king of Persia?

- Nehemiah had letters of safe conduct from Artaxerxes. The non-Jews knew that Nehemiah was held in high regard by Artaxerxes.
- If the non-Jews' allegations were found to be false, then Artaxerxes would turn on them. They would lose their lucrative positions as sub-governors.

k. How did Nehemiah respond to the non-Jews?

I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."⁹ They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." Nehemiah 6:8-9

l. What was Nehemiah's prayer?

But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." Nehemiah 6:9

2. Read Nehemiah 6:10-14.

a. What was the next attempt to stop Nehemiah?

One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." Nehemiah 6:10

b. What was Nehemiah's response and what did he realize about this attempt?

But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!"¹² I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.¹³ He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me. Nehemiah 6:11-13

- c. Verse 13 speaks of Nehemiah committing a sin by entering the Temple to save his life. While the text is not clear, how does 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 offer some context?
- But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. ¹⁷ Azariah the priest with eighty other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. ¹⁸ They confronted King Uzziah and said, “It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God.”
¹⁹ Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD’s temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. ²⁰ When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him.
²¹ King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house — leprous, and banned from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land. 2 Chronicles 26:16-21
- Nehemiah was not a priest and had no right to barricade himself in the Temple.
- d. What do you think Shemaiah was hoping Nehemiah would do in the Temple? Shemaiah was hoping that Nehemiah would barricade himself in the Temple and thus commit a sin. Perhaps God would strike him with leprosy as he did with King Uzziah.
- e. What imprecatory prayer (a prayer of demand) does Nehemiah make regarding the non-Jews?
Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. Nehemiah 6:14
- f. What is the implication regarding the prophet Noadiah and the rest of the prophets?
These were false prophets who had no love for Nehemiah.
- g. How long did it take to complete the wall?
52 days

3. Read Nehemiah 6:16-19.

- a. What was the reaction of the surrounding nations to the completion of Jerusalem's walls?

When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. Nehemiah 6:16

- b. What was the relationship between Tobiah and many people of Judah?

Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. Nehemiah 6:17

- c. How had the issue of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews figured in this relationship?

For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekariah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Nehemiah 6:18

- d. What did the people of Judah say about Tobiah?

Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. Nehemiah 6:19

- e. What was Tobiah still doing?

And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me. Nehemiah 6:19

4. Read Nehemiah 7:1-3. What did Nehemiah do to secure Jerusalem?

After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, **the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed.** ² **I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.** ³ I said to them, **“The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses.”**
Nehemiah 7:1-3

5. From Nehemiah 7:4-73,

- a. How did Nehemiah describe Jerusalem?

Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. Nehemiah 7:4

b. What did God put into his heart?

So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. Nehemiah 7:5

c. What was the starting point for the registration of families?

I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. Nehemiah 7:5

Nehemiah 6 - 7

Tactics to Disrupt Building the Walls

- #1: Discouraged and Ridiculed the Builders, But Nehemiah Encouraged Them to Persist (Nehemiah 2 and 4)
- #2: Plotted to Attack the Builders, But God Protected the People (Nehemiah 4)
- #3: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem Tried to Lure Nehemiah Away From Jerusalem For a Meeting
 - Nehemiah Saw Through This Ruse, a Likely Attempt to Capture or Kill Him, And He Refused to Go to the Plain of Ono (Nehemiah 6)
 - What Would Have Been the Reaction of King Artaxerxes if Nehemiah Had Been Imprisoned or Killed?

Tactics to Disrupt Building the Walls

- #4: An Open Letter From Sanballat to Nehemiah, Containing Blatant Threats; Anyone Could Have Read the Letter
 - Sanballat Threatened to Report to the King That the Jews Were Plotting a Revolt and About to Make Nehemiah King
 - Nehemiah Told Sanballat He Was Making Things Up
 - Obviously, the Letter Was Never Sent (Nehemiah 6)
 - Sanballat Likely Wanted Those Who Read the Letter to Put Pressure on Nehemiah to Halt Work on the Walls

Tactics to Disrupt Building the Walls

- #5: Shemaiah, a False Prophet, Tried to Encourage Nehemiah to Barricade Himself Within the Temple on a False Message That Men Were Coming to Kill Nehemiah
 - Shemaiah's Suggestion is Interpreted That Nehemiah Should Hide Himself Behind the Holy of Holies' Curtain
 - Nehemiah Knew That This Risked God's Wrath
 - Nehemiah 6:11b; Nehemiah Was Not a Priest
 - Numbers 18:7
 - Nehemiah Realized That Shemaiah Had Been Hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to Intimidate Him and to Ruin His Reputation; He Did Not Fall for the Ruse (Nehemiah 6)

Tactics to Disrupt Building the Walls

- #6: The Prophetess Noadiah and Other False Prophets Tried to Intimidate Nehemiah; This Failed
- The Wall Was Completed on the 25th of Elul, in 52 Days
- Elul Falls in August/September, When the Grapes, Figs, Pomegranates, and Olives Were Harvested
- The People Labored on the Wall From the Hot Summer Until the Cooler Fall Days
- The Poor and the Farmers Who Labored on the Wall Were Suffering; They Could Not Both Work and Harvest Simultaneously (Nehemiah 5 and 6)

52 Days to Build the Wall; How?

- From Ezra 4:12 (Early in the Reign of Artaxerxes), the People Had Started Restoring the Walls and Foundations
- Nehemiah Engaged Every Person He Could to Work on the Wall From Dawn to Dusk Every Day
- The Quality of These Walls Was Not the Same Quality as Those Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar
- Nevertheless, They Provided the Necessary Security for Jerusalem



North Tower and Jerusalem City Wall Built
by Nehemiah; copyright: biblicalarchaeology.org

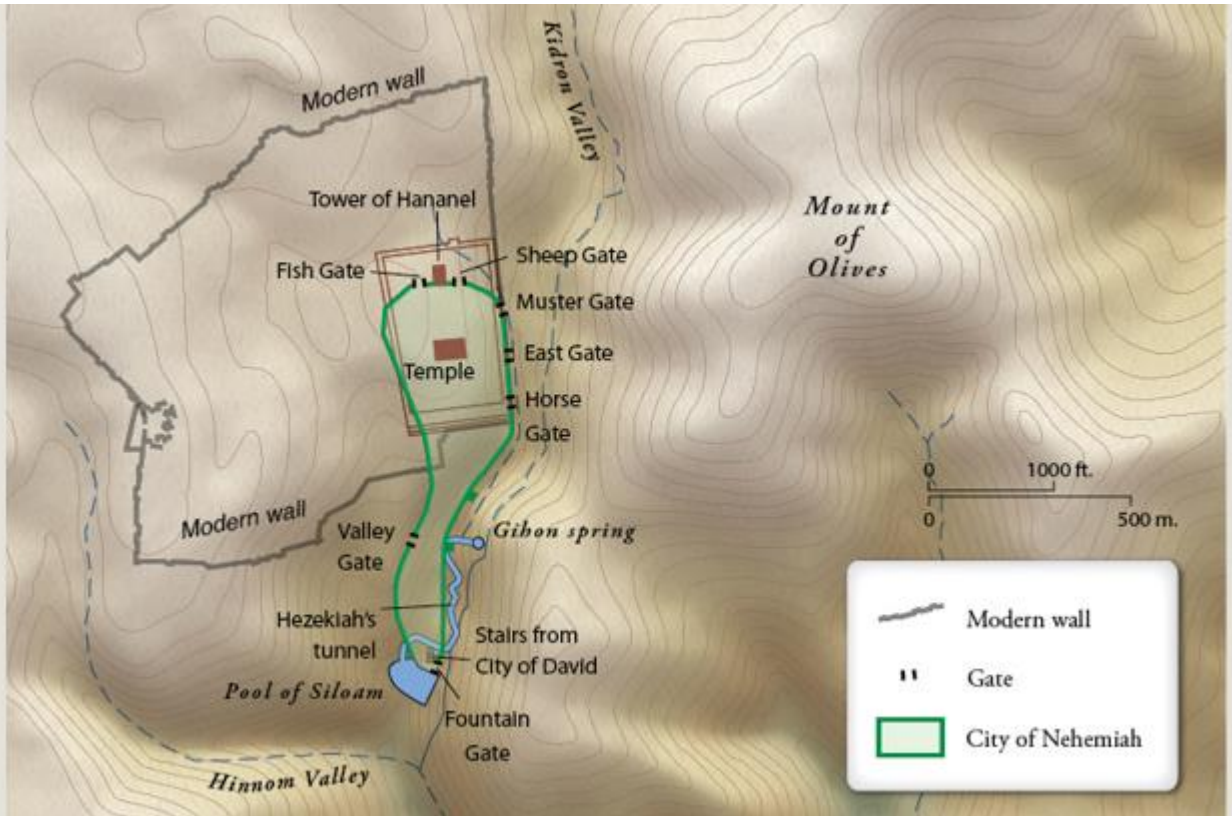
Tactics to Disrupt Building the Walls

- #7: Tobiah, the Sub-Governor of Ammon, Sent Intimidating Letters to Nehemiah
 - Some Nobles of Judah Were Bound by Oath to Tobiah
 - Tobiah Had Leverage in the Judean Community as He Had Married Into a Jewish Family and So Had His Son
 - Obviously, Ezra's Reforms Against Intermarriage Had Started Crumbling
 - The Judean Nobles Were Writing to Nehemiah Telling of Tobiah's "Good Deeds" (Nehemiah 6)

After the Wall Was Completed

- Nehemiah Took Additional Steps to Protect the City
 - He Appointed Gatekeepers With the Musicians and Levites as Backups, an Unusual But Appropriate Practice For the Times
 - He Appointed His Brother Hanani to Supervise Jerusalem
 - He Appointed Hananiah as Commander of the Military Citadel; Some of the Beams From Susa Were Used to Build This Citadel (Nehemiah 2:8); Likely the Tower of Hananel on the Drawing
 - The City Gates Were Not Be Opened at First Light But When the Sun Was Hot
 - Nehemiah Feared an Early Morning Attack; There May Have Been a Shortage of Gatekeepers for Dawn to Dusk Coverage
 - He Created a Civilian Guard to Keep Watch

Diagram of Jerusalem City Walls at the Time of Nehemiah; copyright: NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, 2016, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan



Living in Jerusalem

- Sparsely Populated, as Few Houses Had Been Rebuilt
- In Order to Encourage Residents to Rebuild, Nehemiah Used the Original List of Returning Exiles to Make an Equitable Decision on Who Should Move to Jerusalem