

Nehemiah 6: 1-13

Week 6 - Prayer for Perseverance

Learning Objectives

- *Better understand the kinds of internal/external opposition we might face in our mission as a Church.*
- *Consider how we are to be faithful to God's commands (especially with our actions and prayers) amidst this opposition.*

Pray for your time together!

PART ONE: The enemy tries to *harm* Nehemiah, but Nehemiah perseveres...

Read Out Loud: Nehemiah 6:1-9 (NIV)

When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates—² Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me;³ 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?”⁴ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

⁵Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter⁶ 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 king⁷ 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.”

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

Systemic Hatred

Sanballat was a Horonite and Tobiah was an Ammonite – two people groups that were driven out of the promised land by the Israelites. The Horonites and Ammonites hated the Jewish people. This resentment and racism spanned generations, and was still present by the time of Nehemiah. As a result, Sanballat and Tobiah would have likely felt a claim to the promised land, which would have put them in conflict with Nehemiah and his heritage.

? What was Nehemiah's mission and how did it reflect God's greater purpose?

Possible Answers: Nehemiah was looking to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem, which had been the Jewish capital before the Babylonian invasion. Ultimately, Nehemiah hoped to restore the faith of the Jewish people so they would turn back to God, praise Him, and continue to eagerly trust in a coming Savior.

? Why do you think the enemies of Nehemiah were opposed to his mission?

Possible Answers: They may have been resentful of the Israelites and/or may have been afraid of the Israelites gaining power and revolting. (See Systemic Hatred sidebar)

Where is Ono?

According to The Reformation Study Bible, "Ono" was in the far northwestern corner of Judah which is as far away from the safety of Jerusalem as possible without leaving the country. This shows the craftiness of the enemy in their attempts to lure Nehemiah into danger and distract him from his mission.

? Why did Sanballat send an "open letter" to Nehemiah? Why do you think he wanted everyone else to see what he had written?

Possible Answers: It shows that Sanballat wanted the contents of the letter to be public and even gossiped about. The more that people knew about Nehemiah's "plot," the more fear would spread and the more difficult Nehemiah's mission would be.

? What does Godly opposition look like today?

Possible Answers: Opposition could come in the form of others looking down upon you for not seeking out worldly pleasures (ie. money, fame, success) at the expense of your faith. It could also look like facing social awkwardness at work/school because of your belief in Jesus.

? Have you ever been afraid of doing something you knew was the right thing to do? Why?

? How should we respond in a way that honors God, when we feel attacked?

Possible Answers: Continue to obey God's word and seek Him in prayer no matter what people think. Keep our eyes on the course!

PART TWO: The enemy tries to discredit Nehemiah, but Nehemiah perseveres...

Read Out Loud: Nehemiah 6:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ 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.

? What are Nehemiah’s enemies trying to accomplish by trapping him in the temple?

Possible Answers: Nehemiah’s enemies were trying to get him to compromise his conviction to the Lord by tricking him into entering the temple and disobeying God’s commands. If Nehemiah were to listen, he would become a lawbreaker and a coward and be discredited in the people’s eyes. (See: It’s a Trap sidebar)

? Has anyone ever tried to tempt you into a situation that might discredit your faith or get you to dishonor the Lord? How did you respond?

? How might Nehemiah’s actions provide guidance when we face opposition?

Leader’s Note: For further study, dig into the later half of John. You will see many parallels between Jesus and Nehemiah. Jesus was discredited, intimidated, and of course ultimately harmed, yet he stayed true to his mission. Scripture functions as a large book with one “meta-narrative,” so it is helpful to make ties like this between books!

Read Out Loud: As modern believers, we want to consider how these ancient stories might inform our lives today. We are not the first to experience opposition in our faith! As you read the following passage, which was written by the apostle Paul, pay attention to the specific behavioral instructions and how Nehemiah actually reflected them.

Read Out Loud: Romans 12:9-17 (NIV)

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with

It’s a trap!

Nehemiah was a layman and therefore not allowed to enter the temple. In fact, those who entered the temple, without following the Jewish Law, often suffered the wrath of God (Reference: Numbers 18:6-7 and 2 Chronicles 26:16-20). Nehemiah’s enemies try to trick Nehemiah by threatening his life – hoping that Nehemiah will break the Jewish laws to which he ascribes. However, even when threatened with death, Nehemiah ultimately honors God’s wishes.

those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

? This passage gives explicit commands for how to interact with the “Sanballats” and “Tobiahs” in our lives. What does Paul tell us to do?

Possible Answers: Trust God for justice, love everyone, live in harmony, bless people, be patient, persevere. Ultimately, all of this is in service of honoring our Creator.

? How did you observe Nehemiah doing some of the things Paul instructs us to do here?

Possible Answers: He was patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, did not repay evil for evil, and did what was right in the eyes of everyone.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Nehemiah experienced a lot of opposition and resistance. He responded – in part – through prayer. How should the opposition you’ve faced shape your prayers? What should change?

? Think of some opposition in your life that you need to preserve through. What might be keeping you from trusting in God and seeing His mission through? How can you better prepare for further opposition?