

## Nehemiah 6:14-19

### Week 7 - Prayer for Justice

#### Learning Objectives

- Understand forgiveness through an understanding of the Gospel
- Understand the importance/weight of our witness as ambassadors of Christ.

**Read out loud:** Last week we looked at how Nehemiah persevered through opposition. This week we will look at Nehemiah's request for justice.

#### Nehemiah 6:14-19 (NIV)

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

<sup>16</sup>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.

<sup>17</sup>Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

#### Refresher on the Enemies:

**Tobiah** An Ammonite prince, in league with Sanballat and the Samaritans against the pious Jews, who were rebuilding the ruined temple ( Nehemiah 2:10; 4:3.) His threats and treachery were employed in vain. During Nehemiah's absence, Tobiah was unlawfully established by some of the chief men of Judah, his relatives, in a fine apartment of the new temple; but was ignominiously expelled on the governor's return (Nehemiah 6:17-19; 13:1-9.) (ATS Bible Dictionary)

**Sanballat the Horonite, a Moabite of Horonaim** (Nehemiah 2:10,13; 13:28) He held apparently some command in Samaria at the time Nehemiah was preparing to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, B.C. 445, (Nehemiah 4:2) and from the moment of Nehemiah's arrival in Judea he set himself to oppose every measure for the welfare of Jerusalem. The only other incident in his life is his alliance with the high priest's family by the marriage of his daughter with one of the grandsons of Eliashib; but the expulsion from the priesthood of the guilty son of Joiada by Nehemiah promptly followed. Here the scriptural narrative ends. (Smith's Bible Dictionary)

? From the last study, how have we seen Nehemiah respond in the face of an adversary?

*Possible answers: confidence, courage, faith (Nehemiah 6:1-13)*

? Why does Nehemiah ask God to remember the actions of Tobiah, Sanballat and Noadiah?

*Possible answers: Nehemiah may be requesting that God remembers the persistent, crafty and dangerous actions of these enemies so that God may provide justice. Perhaps he is lifting them up in prayers knowing they are not following the Lord in their actions. Perhaps Nehemiah is looking for a reward for his obedience.*

### **Hebrews 10:19-22 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

? Would you describe Nehemiah's prayers so far as "draw[ing] near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings"? Why or why not?

*Answers may vary based on individual respondents*

**Read out loud:** As Christians, the ideas of justice and forgiveness are essential to our faith. The two are often closely linked but can exist independently of one another. We may be called to forgive individuals who are unwilling to acknowledge they have wronged us. We may also be called to extend forgiveness to individuals who are unwilling to accept our forgiveness. As far as justice goes, we look to Jesus as our example of justice, who didn't consider equality with God something to be grasped, but rather emptied himself on the cross for us (Philippians 2:5-8).

? Do you feel that Nehemiah is in a position to forgive individuals who are unwilling to acknowledge the hurt they have caused him?

*Possible answer: Since Tobiah and Sanballat are not Jews or followers of Yahweh, they probably do not have a right understanding of their actions, or care about how they are wronging Nehemiah and God's people.*

**Read:** "Forgiving people who harm us is one of the most difficult things to do in life. And the deeper the wound, the more challenging it gets. We often feel confused about what real forgiveness looks like. Are we to "forgive and forget"? Is that even possible? And what exactly does it mean to "love my enemy"? What about the person who sexually abused me? Or the boss who furthered his career at my expense? Or the spouse who cheated on me? Or the friend who slandered me and damaged my reputation?" - Robert H. Thune & Will Walker, *The Gospel Centered Life*

? How would you explain forgiveness to someone?

*Possible answers: recognizing first that an offense was made and then choosing to release feelings of bitterness, resentment, and vengeance*

? What issues of “justice” are involved with Nehemiah’s situation?

*Possible answers: being treated unfairly, lies being told, people doubting what God had called Nehemiah to do*

? What situations can you think of where forgiveness might happen without justice, or vice versa?

*Possible answers may vary.*

## **2 Corinthians 5:19-21 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Forgiveness is costly. It means canceling a debt when we feel we have every right to demand payment. It means absorbing the pain, hurt, shame and grief of someone’s sin against us. It means longing for repentance and restoration. But this is exactly how God has acted toward us in Jesus Christ. And through the gospel, the Holy Spirit empowers us to do the same toward others.” -Gospel Centered Life, Thune & Walker

? Why is it often difficult for us as Christians to forgive others?

*Possible answers: we forget the gospel, we think too highly of ourselves, we have sin in our hearts, we feel like we deserve better than having to forgive others.*

? Do you think Nehemiah is asking God to remember out of a forgiving heart?

*Possible answers: Nehemiah is cupbearer for the king and he is a leader to the Israelites in this building project. We cannot know his heart; however, we can assume that from his leadership experience, he understands the calling of living as Christ’s ambassador, and therefore is seeking righteousness with his request.*

## **For Discussion and Accountability**

? Think of someone you need to forgive. What issues of “justice” are involved with that situation? How has this person wronged you, hurt you, or sinned against you?

? Think of someone you need to forgive. How have you been “draw[ing] near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” with this situation?

? Think of your debt before God. How does this compare to debts you might be owed or owe to others? How can we remind ourselves of the truth that we have been forgiven a debt far greater than we could ever repay?