



C. Conflict from Without and Within (Nehemiah 6:1-14)

1. Opposition from without (Nehemiah 6:1-9)
 - a. The leaders of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:1)
 - (1) Sanballat
 - (2) Tobiah
 - (3) Geshem the Arabian
 - (4) The rest of our enemies
 - b. The initial wave of opposition (Nehemiah 6:2-4)
 - (1) The motivation of the opposition—*“heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein”* (Nehemiah 6:1) Note: The wall was completely rebuilt save the doors had not been set up on all the walls.
 - (2) The actions of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:2)
 - a) A meeting requested—*“let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.”*
 - i) Ono is where Benjamites from Geba dwelt upon returning from captivity with Zerubbabel. It was known as the valley of craftsmen (Nehemiah 11:31-35).
 - ii) They sent a messenger to Nehemiah with this seemingly peaceful request.
 - iii) They hoped to deceive Nehemiah under the guise of a truce and a peaceful meeting.
 - b) A motive unveiled—*“they thought to do me mischief.”*
 - i) Based on this statement, Tobiah and Sanballat hoped their intentions would be perceived as the exact opposite of *mischief* toward Nehemiah.
 - ii) They hoped Nehemiah would not recognize the ploy to get him out from the protection of the city and the people so that they could do him harm.
 - iii) Nehemiah clearly saw through their attempt and recognized it for what it was.
 - (3) The response to the opposition (Nehemiah 6:3)
 - a) The action of the response—*“I sent messengers unto them”*
 - b) The message carried
 - i) A work for the Lord—*“I am doing a great work.”* Nehemiah kept in mind first that the work was a great *“work of the Lord”* (Nehemiah 3:5).
 - ii) The priority of the Lord’s work—*“why should the work cease”*. Nehemiah had his heart fixed on God and on completing God’s work. He would not allow distractions to prevent the work from being completed.
 - iii) The wisdom of Nehemiah’s response—The work on the wall would have ceased if Nehemiah accepted the enemies offer. He acknowledge this to be true—*“why should the work cease”*.



- (4) The persistence of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:4)
 - a) The enemies' persistence
 - i) They sent unto Nehemiah four times.
 - ii) Each time, they sent "*after this sort*" or with the same tactics and message.
 - iii) Note: This reminds us that we are not ignorant of the Devil's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). It is not that he employs new tactics but continues to use the same tactics and messages. Why? Because it often works.
 - b) Nehemiah's persistence
 - i) He answered them four times.
 - ii) He answered, "*after the same manner.*"
- c. The new tactic of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:5-9)
 - (1) The introduction of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:5)
 - a) The delivery—Sanballat sent his servant, maybe Tobiah (see Nehemiah 2:10).
 - b) The persistence
 - i) In like manner
 - ii) The fifth time
 - c) The uniqueness—"*with an open letter in his hand*"; Note: An open letter is one that is read before a general assembly versus a specific individual. This is confirmed in the context when Nehemiah said this letter "*made us afraid*" (Nehemiah 6:9).
 - (2) The means of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:6-7)
 - a) The attempt at credibility (Nehemiah 6:6)
 - i) It is reported among the heathen.
 - ii) Gashmu saith it.
 - b) The accusations hurled (Nehemiah 6:6-7)
 - i) Nehemiah and the Jews built the wall because they thought to rebel (Nehemiah 6:6).
 - ii) Nehemiah did what he did in hopes of becoming Israel's king (Nehemiah 6:6).
 - iii) Nehemiah appointed prophets to preach of him at Jerusalem, saying, "*There is a king in Judah*" (Nehemiah 6:7).
 - c) The threat leveled—"*now shall it be reported to the king according to these words*" (Nehemiah 6:7). This would have been cause for serious concern.
 - d) The request made (Nehemiah 6:7)
 - i) A desire for a meeting—"*Come now therefore*"; The previous requests to meet came under the guise of peace. When those attempts failed, they resorted to threats and intimidation.
 - ii) A desire for a seat at the table—"*let us take counsel together*"; Note: The enemies of the Jews wanted power and control over the decisions made by Nehemiah and the Jews.



- (3) The response to the opposition (Nehemiah 6:8-9)
- a) The clarification in Nehemiah's response (Nehemiah 6:8)
 - i) The means of his response—*"I sent unto him"*;
Note: Even in this, Nehemiah's steadfastness is clear. He did not personally leave the work to respond. He sent someone else.
 - ii) The message of his response
 - (a) The discount of the accusations—*"There are no such things done as thou sayest"*
 - (b) The assessment of the accusations—*"thou feignest them out of thine own heart"*
 - iii) The minimization of his response
 - (a) If this message had been sent to king Artaxerxes it could have been a very serious matter warranting the king's military response.
 - (b) Nehemiah's response to the threat was rather minimal compared to the seriousness of the threat but this showed Sanballat that the Jews were not concerned, nor were they intimidated.
 - (c) Nehemiah had a good relationship with king Artaxerxes built upon trust and therefore he believed the king would not believe the lies. Remember that Artaxerxes authorized Nehemiah to return and build the wall (Nehemiah 2:6).
 - b) The concern in Nehemiah's response (Nehemiah 6:9)
 - i) The letter's apparent success
 - (a) The enemies' mission—*"Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done."*
 - (b) The enemies' accomplishment—*"they all made us afraid"*; Note: The letter did, in part, serve its purpose by causing fear in the Jews' hearts.
 - ii) The counteraction to the letter
 - (a) Nehemiah believed he had to send a response to Sanballat, for the sake of the Jews, which is confirmed by verse 9 beginning with *"for."* In other words, he sent the response to Sanballat for the threat made the Jews afraid.
 - (b) Nehemiah's response, which showed no fear or intimidation, would have been an encouragement to the Jews that their leader was confident and not fearful.
 - (c) Yet, it seems that Nehemiah also shared in the fear since he says that it made *"us"* afraid.
 - (d) Nehemiah took his fear and concern to God and asked him to *"strengthen my hands"* so that he could continue to confidently lead the people in the work.



2. Opposition from within (Nehemiah 6:10-14)
 - a. The subtilty of the opposition (Nehemiah 6:10)
 - (1) The visit to Shemaiah
 - a) The timing of the visit—“*Afterward*”; Note: As if it were not enough that Nehemiah had to deal with the open letter, he had to immediately turn his focus to another problem before moving forward with the work.
 - b) The instigator of the visit—“*I came unto the house*”; Note: We cannot be sure why Nehemiah determined to visit Shemaiah. The order of the text leads us to believe Shemaiah’s being shut up provoked Nehemiah to pay him a visit. Perhaps Shemaiah’s conduct was imposing fear on those around him. It is also possible that he was actively spreading fear through his words. Practically speaking, one individual living in fear produces other individuals who live in fear.
 - c) The person being visited
 - i) His name—Shemaiah, which means *Jehovah hears*
 - ii) His lineage
 - (a) The son of Delaiah
 - (b) The son of Mehetabeel
 - iii) Note: Consider a possible motivation for Shemaiah’s behaviour.
 - (a) We know nothing else of this man other than what we find in the immediate context of this passage.
 - (b) However, it is possible that his motive is exposed in his being the son of Delaiah. Nehemiah 7:61-64 identifies a Delaiah and his children which were unable to prove their lineage and thus were “*put from the priesthood.*” If this is the same Delaiah, there could have been bitterness in their hearts over being put from the priesthood over what they might have deemed small technicalities.
 - (c) Regardless, what a shame for a man to become famous for spreading fear at the enemies’ bidding!
 - d) The fear in the visit
 - i) Shemaiah’s seclusion—“*who was shut up*”
 - ii) Shemaiah’s suggestions
 - (a) Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple.
 - (b) Let us shut the doors of the temple.
 - iii) Shemaiah’s surmising
 - (a) They will come to slay thee.
 - (b) In the night will they come to slay thee.
 - iv) Note: A warning of pending assassination was nothing to take lightly. If Nehemiah was killed, the work would undoubtedly stop.



- b. The victory over the opposition (Nehemiah 6:11-13)
 - (1) Nehemiah's response (Nehemiah 6:11)
 - a) His contemplations
 - i) Should such a man as I flee?
 - ii) Who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life?
 - iii) Note: Nehemiah twice referenced his position as leader "*such a man as I*" and "*being as I am.*" He obviously understood the seriousness of his role as a leader. What a detriment it would have been to the people had he put himself first and showed cowardice and fear.
 - b) His conclusion—"*I will not go in.*"
 - (2) Nehemiah's perception (Nehemiah 6:12-13)
 - a) The plot uncovered by his perception (Nehemiah 6:12)
 - i) God had not sent Shemaiah to warn Nehemiah.
 - ii) Shemaiah pronounced this prophecy against Nehemiah at the bidding of Tobiah and Sanballat.
 - b) The purpose uncovered by his perception (Nehemiah 6:13)
 - i) Nehemiah's fear—Shemaiah was hired to put Nehemiah in fear.
 - ii) Nehemiah's sin—Shemaiah anticipated that fear would cause Nehemiah to act foolishly and sin.
 - (a) By and large, people will abandon convictions, principles, and common decency when being motivated by fear.
 - (b) We can see this tactic clearly in Nehemiah chapter 6 alone. The enemy started the conversation in the guise of peace but when that failed, they increased their attempts to destroy by fear and intimidation. Fear was the next level to get what they wanted.
 - (c) Nehemiah perceived the attempt to put him in fear as well as the sinful decisions that presented themselves should he be motivated by that fear.
 - iii) Nehemiah's testimony—If Nehemiah became filled with fear, the fear would lead him to sin, and:
 - (a) They (the enemies) might have matter for an evil report.
 - (b) They (the enemies) might reproach Nehemiah.
 - (c) Note: If Nehemiah's character failed under pressure, his credibility as a leader of the people and a follower of God would have been greatly damaged, if not destroyed. Thankfully, Nehemiah had wisdom and prudence from God and was able to perceive possible outcomes from his decisions before making those decisions. Furthermore, he allowed that wisdom to shape his decisions.



- c) The mystery of his perception
 - i) The question—How did Nehemiah perceive the hiring of Shemaiah by Tobiah and Sanballat?
 - ii) The consideration
 - (a) Did Nehemiah perceive the plot because of something he saw in Shemaiah?
 - (i) Maybe he could see a lack of sincerity in Shemaiah’s words and counsel.
 - (ii) If Shemaiah was the son of a family that had been booted from the priesthood, maybe Nehemiah perceived bitterness.
 - (b) Did Nehemiah perceive the plot because of enlightenment in his conscience?
 - (c) Did Nehemiah perceive the plot because of the work of the Holy Ghost in his heart?
 - iii) The conclusion
 - (a) Perhaps Nehemiah’s perception came as a culmination of all the above.
 - (b) Regardless of how he perceived the deception, it remains clear that Nehemiah was a prudent man (Proverbs 22:3; Proverbs 27:12) that walked circumspectly, always considering his surroundings and possible threats from his enemies (see Ephesians 5:15).
- c. The prayer concerning the opposition (Nehemiah 6:14)
 - (1) The recipient of the prayer
 - a) His identity—“*God*”
 - b) His association to the one praying—“*My*”
 - (2) The request of the prayer
 - a) Think Thou upon...
 - b) According to these their works
 - c) Note: Obviously, the request of Nehemiah’s prayer was that God would consider the works and the parties involved in the works and deal with them accordingly. He must have known that if the deeds had God’s attention they would be dealt with in an appropriate fashion.
 - (3) The focus of the prayer
 - a) The people
 - i) Tobiah
 - ii) Sanballat
 - iii) The prophetess Noadiah
 - iv) The rest of the prophets
 - b) The problem—“*that would have put me in fear*”; Note: An interesting point that we see in Nehemiah’s pray was that Tobiah actually did get wicked prophets to go about preaching that Nehemiah was set up as the king of Judah as he had said in his letter (Nehemiah 6:7).