

Nehemiah—Building for the Future

STUDY 6

When all hell breaks loose

Nehemiah Chapter 6

Introduction

What's in a name? It is interesting to contrast the meaning of the name Nehemiah and that with his chief opposer Sanballat. Nehemiah means "YAHWEH comforts" in Hebrew, derived from נָחַם (nacham) meaning "comfort" and יָהּ (yah) referring to the Hebrew God.

Sanballat: A Babylonian name, meaning "Sin (the moon-god) has given life." He most probably came from either Upper or Lower Beth Horon, two key cities 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem, which guarded the main road to Jerusalem. These roads will feature in the account of this study.

It is reasonable to deduce that the Lord has had some providence in the meanings of these names. It could be said it is a dead giveaway that Sanballat, with a name that means "Sin has given life" is clearly the sort of individual that will oppose the purposes of the one true God. Yet we observe in this passage that some of the Jewish people actually side with him and his supporters Tobiah and Gesham.

In chapter four we observed strong external opposition taking place and in chapter five internal division was apparent. Now in chapter six all hell breaks loose as Nehemiah has to face both external opposition and internal division! (Zondervan Niv. Exhaustive Concordance Second Edition. Edward W. Goodrick & John R. Kohlenberger 111. Zondervan. Copyright 1999. Pages 1452 & 1459).

Opening Discussion Questions

Have you ever felt that everything is against you?

Have ever been falsely accused?

How did it make you feel?

What did you do about it?

As a group read Nehemiah 6:1-19

Geshem, who is mentioned more in this chapter than any others, may have been in charge of a north Arabian confederacy that controlled vast areas from northern Arabia and southern Palestine. Geshem could have been opposed to Nehemiah's development of an independent kingdom because he feared that it might interfere with his lucrative spice trade. The requested meeting at the plain of Ono (Neh. 1:2) is about halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria; but a one-day Journey for Nehemiah. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Copyright 1979. Page 107).

1. Examine Nehemiah 6:1-4. Why wouldn't Nehemiah go to meet with these leaders?

1a. What can we learn from Nehemiah's response?

Sanballat probably realises this is his last chance. The walls are complete, the fortified gates are in place, only the smaller doors within the gates are not yet hung. He knows it would be very unwise to mount a heavy militarised siege against the city once the cities' defences are fully complete. Word would get back to King Artaxerxes; Nehemiah and the Jews are part of his Empire and so under his protection. Far better to assassinate Nehemiah and fabricate a plausible story, "Killed by bandits when travelling to negotiate" for instance. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Christ Centred Exposition. James M. Hamilton Jr. Holman Reference. Nashville Tennessee. Copyright 2014. Page 136).

2. Read Nehemiah 6:5-8. What is the significance of an unsealed letter?

2a. What is Sanballat aiming to do with the information contained in the letter?

2b. What do we learn from Nehemiah's response?

2c. How can we apply the themes of this passage to our own lives?

3. Read Nehemiah 6:8. Nehemiah seems consistently discerning of people's true motives, why?

4: Consider Nehemiah 6:10-13. It seems a very spiritual thing to go and meet in the temple. Why was Nehemiah opposed to this?

4a. What did Nehemiah mean when he referred to committing a sin in verse 13? Consider Numbers 18:22-23a to assist with the answer.

4b. When active in the work of God there will be times that Satan will try to cause you to sin and discredit you. What do we learn from Nehemiah in this passage?

Tobiah the Ammonite had numerous binding agreements “by oath” (Neh. 6:18) within the Jewish community; these were probably trading contracts facilitated by his marriage connections. (Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Copyright 1979. Pages 110-111).

5. Read Nehemiah 4:2-3. What had Tobiah’s attitude been towards the Jews as they tried to reconstruct the city walls?

6. Reflect upon Nehemiah 6:14, 17-19. Why would the nobles of Judah be speaking positively about Tobiah, reporting to Nehemiah “his good deeds?”

6a. Nehemiah had left a prestigious and lucrative position in Susa, travelled a vast distance to help the Jews be re-established as a nation. How do you think he felt about his fellow Jews praising one of his greatest opponents?

6b. Many of the Jews that were now supportive of Tobiah the Ammonite were believers in God. Do you think Satan can use people to manipulate Christians to oppose the very work God wants done? Explain your conclusion or give an example in your answer.

7. Clarify how the following N.T. Scripture 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 sheds light on what may be taking place in Nehemiah chapter 6.

8. Read Nehemiah 6:15-16, 7:1-2. What happened to Nehemiah's enemies when Jerusalem's fortified walls were so rapidly completed?

8a. Who did Nehemiah's enemies attribute the Jewish people's success to?

In conclusion, we have observed Nehemiah come under serious attacks which we understand Satan was ultimately behind. Today we can learn from the way Nehemiah responded each time:

1. (A) When active in the work of God Satan will distract!
(B) Our response: stay focused on the vision (Neh. 6:1-4).
2. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will try and turn people against you.
(B) Our response: simply speak the truth (Neh. 6:5-8).
3. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will try to cause you to sin and discredit you.
(B) Our response: know the word of God and practice spiritual discernment (Neh. 6:10-13)
4. (A) When active in the work of God understand that Satan can manipulate believers to oppose the kingdom of God.
(B) Our response: make sure you never become one of them! (Neh. 6:14, 17-19).
5. (A) When active in the work of God, Satan will bring his greatest opposition when you are close to victory.
(B) Our response: persevere to the completion of what God has called you to do (Neh. 6: 15-16).

Focus on the above principles; as a group pray them over your church and ministries perhaps choosing one principle per person.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be a discerning people.

If a member of the group feels they are under spiritual attack give them the chance to share and pray for them.

Study Notes: