

**Nehemiah 6**  
**November 14, 2021**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: I want you to think about leaders you have worked under. Or perhaps you are or have been a leader yourself. Based on your experiences, what makes leadership so hard? What do leaders endure that makes it difficult for them? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** The average person doesn't realize the tremendous pressures and tests that people experience day after day in places of leadership. Leaders are often blamed for things they didn't do and criticized for things they tried to do. They are misquoted and misunderstood and rarely given the opportunity to set the record straight. If they act quickly, they are reckless; if they bide their time, they are cowardly or unconcerned. Referring to the pressures of leadership, President Harry Truman wrote in *Mr. Citizen*, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

People in places of *spiritual* leadership not only have the pressures that all leaders face, but they must also battle an infernal enemy who is a master deceiver and a murderer. Satan comes either as a serpent who deceives or a lion who devours (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Peter 5:8), and Christian leaders must be alert and spiritually equipped to oppose him. It behooves God's people to pray earnestly, not only for those in *civil* authority (1 Tim. 2:1–3), but also for those in places of *spiritual* authority. If Satan can defeat a Christian leader, he can cripple a whole ministry and discredit the cause of Christ.

Let's see how Nehemiah dealt with all the pressures that came his way. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

**Further Opposition to the Rebuilding**

6 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—<sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> 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?" <sup>4</sup> Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

<sup>5</sup> Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter <sup>6</sup> 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 <sup>7</sup> 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 confer together."

<sup>8</sup> I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”

<sup>9</sup> They 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.”

<sup>10</sup> 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.”

<sup>11</sup> But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” <sup>12</sup> I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.

### *The Completion of the Wall*

<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 Shecaniah 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.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

Christian leaders must know how to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded press reports, and gossip. Otherwise, these devilish weapons will so upset them that they will lose their perspective and spend so much time defending themselves that they will neglect their work.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Ne 6:1-14)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

#### **VI. Guile (6:1-4)**

The people went back to work, and so did the enemy. This time Sanballat and his men aimed their attacks on Nehemiah the leader. Many of God's people will never realize here on earth the special temptations and tests God's servants face day after day. Spiritual leadership is a costly thing. Sanballat invited Nehemiah to a friendly meeting on the Plain of Ono, and Nehemiah refused. God's separated servants dare not walk "in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps. 1:1). Beware of the smiles of the enemy, for Satan is more dangerous when he appears to be your friend than at any other time. Four invitations came (v. 4) and Nehemiah refused them all. "I am doing a great work and cannot come down!" Stay on the job when Satan invites you to quit, and God will bless you.

#### **VII. Slander (6:5-9)**

The fifth time the messenger came, he brought an "open letter" filled with slanderous accusations against Nehemiah and his people. "It is reported" is one of the devil's chief weapons. "They say" or "I have heard" are phrases that usually introduce gossip and lies. Who are "they"? Nehemiah detected the scheme and immediately exposed the lies in the so-called "open letter." His life and character refuted every lie in the letter. In vv. 1-4, the enemy offered to work with the Jews; here in vv. 5-9, the enemy wanted to defame Nehemiah's name. Note how Nehemiah again prayed for God to overrule (v. 9). Servants of God cannot help what people say about them, but they can help what kind of character and testimony they have. If Nehemiah had stopped the work to defend his reputation, the walls would never have been built.

#### **VIII. Threats (6:10-14)**

Shemaiah had shut himself up in his house, apparently afraid of the enemy, but in reality, he was working with the enemy. Why was he not helping the Jews build the wall? It pays to be cautious around so-called Christians who always have advice but never seem to get any work done for Christ themselves. Paul warned about false brethren (2 Cor. 11:26). Shemaiah lied to Nehemiah and tried to frighten him into going out to the enemy for safety. But Nehemiah saw through the scheme and openly refuted Shemaiah's lies. Again, he prayed for God's help and then went right back to work.

The walls were completed in fifty-two days. And the people worked during the hottest part of the year. God was glorified, the enemy was embarrassed (v. 16), but the compromising Jews were still at work trying to get Nehemiah to accept Tobiah. What a burden these nobles of Judah must have been to godly, courageous Nehemiah. The work had been completed. To God be the glory!

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Determined* (pp. 69-81). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## *We Have Heard the Enemy, and He Is a Liar*

Under Nehemiah's gifted leadership, the people completed the rebuilding of the walls. Now all that remained to do was the restoration of the gates and the strengthening of the community within the walls. Since Sanballat and his friends had failed miserably in their attempts to stop the people from working, they decided to concentrate their attacks on Nehemiah. If they could eliminate him, or even discredit him, they could mobilize their allies living in Jerusalem (Neh. 6:17–18) and take over the city.

The average person doesn't realize the tremendous pressures and tests that people experience day after day in places of leadership. Leaders are often blamed for things they didn't do and criticized for things they tried to do. They are misquoted and misunderstood and rarely given the opportunity to set the record straight. If they act quickly, they are reckless; if they bide their time, they are cowardly or unconcerned. Referring to the pressures of leadership, President Harry Truman wrote in *Mr. Citizen*, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

People in places of *spiritual* leadership not only have the pressures that all leaders face, but they must also battle an infernal enemy who is a master deceiver and a murderer. Satan comes either as a serpent who deceives or a lion who devours (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Peter 5:8), and Christian leaders must be alert and spiritually equipped to oppose him. It behooves God's people to pray earnestly, not only for those in *civil* authority (1 Tim. 2:1–3), but also for those in places of *spiritual* authority. If Satan can defeat a Christian leader, he can cripple a whole ministry and discredit the cause of Christ.

The enemy's main purpose was to generate fear in the heart of Nehemiah and his workers (Neh. 6:9, 13–14, 19), knowing that fear destroys faith and paralyzes life. Adolph Hitler wrote, "Mental confusion, contradiction of feeling, indecisiveness, panic; these are our weapons." Both Jesus (Luke 13:31–35) and Paul (Acts 21:10–14) had to face the specter of fear, and both overcame it by faith.

Nehemiah didn't listen to the enemy's lies. He and the people completed the wall and hung the gates in only fifty-two days, much to the chagrin of their adversaries (Neh. 6:15–16). Satan used four strategies in attacking Nehemiah, strategies that he still uses against spiritual leaders today.

### **1. Compromise: "We will help you work" (Neh. 6:1–4)**

Up to this point in the building program, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Gashmu, v. 6) *opposed* everything that the Jews did; but now they offered to *cooperate* and help the Jews build the wall. They offered to meet Nehemiah in a village halfway between Jerusalem and Samaria, a quiet place where they could make plans on how to work together. "We're willing to meet you halfway," was their approach. "Now, don't be an unfriendly neighbor!"

Of course, the enemy's strategy was, "If you can't whip 'em, join 'em—and then take over!" Once the enemy gets a foothold in a ministry, he starts to weaken the work from within; and ultimately, the work will fail. While cooperation in the Lord's work is a noble thing, leaders must take care that they cooperate with the right people at the right time for the right purpose; otherwise, they may end up cooperating with the enemy. Satan is a master deceiver and has his servants ready to join hands with God's people so he can weaken their hands in the work (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

Loving compromise and cooperation can be good and useful things *if there are no moral or spiritual issues involved*. Happy compromise can invigorate a marriage or strengthen a ministry (Phil. 2:1–4), but this is compromise among people who love each other and have the same purposes in mind. When you invite the devil to join your team, expect him to change the rules and the goals; and expect to be defeated.

Nehemiah rejected their offer because of three convictions. First, he knew that they were lying and wanted to kill him (Neh. 6:2). Nehemiah had the kind of spiritual discernment that leaders must possess if they are going to detect the enemy’s strategy and defeat it. Second, he was convinced of the greatness of the work God had given him to do (v. 3). If Nehemiah allowed himself to be distracted and detoured from the work God had called him to do, where would his people go for leadership? A leaderless project is an aimless project and eventually falls apart. Leaders must be good examples and stay on the job.

During over forty years of ministry, as I have watched Christian leaders come and go, I have tried to take Paul’s admonition to heart: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV). I have noticed that when leaders become well-known, they often face the temptation to neglect their God-given work, join the “evangelical jet set,” and start speaking all over the country or the world. Before long, the work at home starts to suffer, and often the leader’s marriage and family suffer with it; and the enemy gets a foothold. Unless some radical changes are made in priorities, the result is tragic for both God’s people and God’s work.

This is not to say that Christian leaders must never leave home to minister elsewhere, for they are a gift to *the whole church* and not just to one work (Eph. 4:11–12). But when “the wider ministry” is more exciting than the work at home, leaders must beware; for the enemy is at work. Dr. Oswald J. Smith used to say, “The light that shines the farthest will shine the brightest at home.”

Behind these two convictions was a third conviction: The Jews had nothing in common with Sanballat and his crowd, so there could be no basis for cooperation. Nehemiah had made that clear at the very outset of the project when he said to Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, “But as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it” (Neh. 2:20, NIV). God’s people are different from the people of the world and must maintain their separated position (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1). If Nehemiah had cooperated with Sanballat and his allies, how could he have led the nation to separate itself from the foreigners in the land? (Neh. 9:2; 10:28; 13:3) He would have been inconsistent.

Nehemiah had both discernment and determination: He refused to be influenced by their repeated offers (6:4; see 4:12). If their offer was wrong the first time, it would be wrong the fourth time or the fiftieth time; and there was no reason for him to reconsider. Decisions based only on *opinions* might be reconsidered, but decisions based on *convictions* must stand unless those convictions are changed. Otherwise, decision becomes indecision; and the leader who ought to be a guidepost becomes a weathervane.

## **2. Slander: “We’ll tell everybody about you” (Neh. 6:5–9)**

The fifth time the enemy approached Nehemiah, it was with an open letter accusing him of sedition. They had hinted at Jewish insurrection before the project had even begun (2:19), perhaps borrowing the idea from the people who had stopped the building of the temple years before (Ezra 4). Even our Lord was accused by His enemies of promoting sedition (Luke 23:1–5). It would be considered a serious charge in Nehemiah’s day, because Persian kings tolerated no resistance from their subjects. Any hint of rebellion was immediately and ruthlessly put down.

It's interesting to see how often the enemy used *letters* in their attacks against the work (Neh. 6:5, 17, 19). An "open letter" to a royal governor would be both intimidating and insulting. Letters to officials were rolled up and secured with seals so that only those with authority could open and read them. Sanballat *wanted* the public to know the contents of the letter because he hoped to undermine Nehemiah's reputation and authority. If some of the Jewish workers believed what was in the letter, Sanballat could organize them and create division within the ranks. It was a splendid opportunity for the enemy to divide and conquer.

Statements like "it's been reported" and "they say" have caused trouble in many local churches and other ministries. In every organization, there are gossip-mongers, hovering like vultures, just waiting for tidbits of slander that they can chew, swallow, and then regurgitate. An anonymous wit has defined *gossip* as news you have to hurry and tell somebody else before you find out it isn't true!

"I would rather play with forked lightning or take in my hands living wires with their fiery current," said A.B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, "than speak a reckless word against any servant of Christ, or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others, to the hurt of their own souls and bodies."

Not only did his enemies falsely accuse Nehemiah of fomenting a rebellion, but they also said he was planning to make himself king and had prophets prepared to announce his coronation (v. 7). If this report got back to the Persian king, there would be immediate reprisal; and that would be the end of the Jerusalem project.

Christian leaders must know how to handle false accusations, vicious letters, unfounded press reports, and gossip. Otherwise, these devilish weapons will so upset them that they will lose their perspective and spend so much time defending themselves that they will neglect their work. Nehemiah didn't make that mistake. He simply denied the reports, prayed to God for strength, *and went back to work*. He knew that his character was such that no honest person would believe the false reports. If we take care of our character, we can trust God to take care of our reputation.

On more than one occasion, Bible teacher G. Campbell Morgan was the target of savage gossip that accused him of unfaithfulness to the Christian faith. His usual approach was to say, "It will blow over. Meanwhile, I go quietly on with my work." Nehemiah would have approved of his approach.

### **3. Threats: "We will protect your life" (Neh. 6:10–14)**

Shemaiah, a hireling prophet (v. 12), devised a clever plan for trapping Nehemiah. He shut himself up in his house and gave the impression that, like Nehemiah, his life was in danger. When Nehemiah came to see him, Shemaiah suggested that they both take refuge in the temple, where the enemy couldn't reach them (Ex. 21:13–14; 1 Kings 1:50–53). His words were very threatening: "They are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you" (Neh. 6:10, NKJV).

Since he had access to the temple, it's possible that Shemaiah was of priestly descent; but even this didn't influence Nehemiah's decision. He quickly detected the hoax and let it be known that he was not about to run away in the face of danger. In the first place, he was not that kind of a leader.

"Should such a man as I flee?" he asked (v. 11). He had previously said, "I cannot come down!" (v. 3) and now he declared, "I will not go in!" (v. 11) Nehemiah was a true shepherd and not a hireling like Shemaiah (John 10:12–13). If he had run away and hidden in the temple, it would have ruined his reputation forever.

Nehemiah rejected Shemaiah's proposal because it was contrary to the Law of Moses. It was forbidden for a layman to go beyond the altar of burnt offering at the temple. "The outsider who comes near shall be put to death" (Num. 18:7, NKJV). When King Uzziah tried to invade the holy precincts, God smote him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21). Nehemiah knew that Shemaiah was a *false* prophet because the message he delivered was contradictory to the Word of God (Deut. 13:1–5 and 18:20–22). "What saith the Scripture?" (Rom. 4:3) must be the test of any message, even if that message comes from somebody who claims to be one of God's servants. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

Nehemiah 6:14 indicates that there was a conspiracy against Nehemiah among the prophets, including a prophetess named Noadiah. This created a great deal of pressure for Nehemiah, for the Jews had great respect for their prophets. Nehemiah was outnumbered, yet he stood his ground. He was a layman opposed by a body of "professionals," yet he refused to give in. He prayed about them and left the matter with the Lord. In verses 9 and 14, we have the fifth and sixth of Nehemiah's "telegraph prayers" that he sent to the Lord in times of crisis. Of course, behind these brief intermittent prayers was a life of prayer that gave them strength.

#### **4. Intrigue: "We will not give up" (Neh. 6:15–19)**

The completion of the walls "in troublous times" (Dan. 9:25) was an embarrassment to the enemy, *but they did not give up*. Satan is not a quitter but stays on the field even after it looks as if he has lost the battle. *Many a careless Christian has won the war but afterward lost the victory*. Satan is always looking for "an opportune time" (Luke 4:13, NIV) to attack the victors and turn them into victims. We need to heed the counsel of that saintly Scottish minister Andrew A. Bonar, who said, "Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle."

If you can't see Satan working, it's probably because he has gone underground. Actually, we are safer when we can see him at work than when his agents are concealed. Open opposition is good for God's work and God's workers because it keeps us alert and trusting the Lord. "Watch and pray!" was certainly one of Nehemiah's chief admonitions to his people (Neh. 4:9).

It seems incredible that *any* Jew would secretly cooperate with the enemy, let alone Jews who were *nobles* from the royal tribe of *Judah*! If any tribe had a stake in the future of "the city of David," it was the tribe of Judah; for God promised that a Savior and King would come from their tribe (Gen. 49:10; 2 Sam. 7). When these nobles cooperated with Tobiah, they were resisting the Lord, disobeying the Word, and jeopardizing their own future.

Why would they do such a treacherous thing? For one thing, Tobiah wrote them letters and influenced their thinking. Instead of seeking the truth, the nobles believed the enemy's lies and became traitors to their own people. Because they believed he was right, some of the men of Judah even took an oath of loyalty to Tobiah! In his letters, Tobiah no doubt flattered them and made promises to them; and they foolishly believed him. The nobles secretly shared the letters with others, and thus the conspiracy grew.

*Don't believe everything you read or hear about Christian leaders*. Consider the source and firmly refuse to accept as truth anything that can't be documented. Especially be wary of what the news media say about evangelical leaders; most media people are not too sympathetic with the Gospel. Looking for exciting stories, some reporters will magnify the insignificant into the sensational, while others will lift statements completely out of context. Sad to say, even the religious press is sometimes guilty of this kind of misrepresentation, including some militant publications that have forgotten how to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). There are times

when you wonder if perhaps we have reached the sad place that Jeremiah wrote about: “Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer” (Jer. 9:4, NIV).

How could these Jews turn their backs on their own heritage, their own brothers and sisters, and their own God? *The bonds of human connection were stronger than the bonds of spiritual affection.* Because Tobiah was tied to the tribe of Judah through marriage, the nobles of Judah gave the loyalty to him that they should have given to God (Neh. 6:18). The men of Judah forgot that they were “married” to Jehovah God and owed Him their love and loyalty.

But before we criticize these Jewish nobles, let’s examine our own lives. Are we totally yielded to the Lord and fully obedient to Him? Do we ever permit human relationships to influence our decisions so much that we deliberately disobey the Word of God? In twenty-five years of pastoral ministry, I have seen more than one professed Christian leave a church fellowship because of something that was done to a relative in the church.

Commodore Josiah Tatnall is an almost forgotten name in American naval history. During the anti-European uprisings in China in 1859, Tatnall came to the aid of a British squadron in the Pei-Ho River and was criticized for it. In his dispatch to the U.S. Secretary of Navy, his defense was simply, “Blood is thicker than water.”

That familiar statement was recorded by John Ray in his *English Proverbs* published in 1670; so it’s been around for a long time. The meaning is obvious: Humanly speaking, you have greater obligation to a relative than you do to a stranger. But Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37, NKJV). The “blood bond” that unites us to Christ is the strongest bond of all, and our loyalty to Him must come first.

The nobles of Judah weren’t satisfied just to get their information and directions from Tobiah, but they felt it necessary to tell Tobiah everything Nehemiah said! No doubt they were hoping to win Tobiah’s favor and thus earn a greater reward when Tobiah and his friends took over Jerusalem. In every sense, they were traitors to the nation and to the Lord. Meshullam was one of the workers on the wall (Neh. 3:4, 30), and yet his family was undermining the very work he was doing.

But these traitors went even further: They repeatedly told Nehemiah what a fine man Tobiah really was! “They that forsake the law praise the wicked; but such as keep the law contend with them” (Prov. 28:4). Had the nobles of Judah been studying and meditating on the Word of God, they would have had discernment and not been walking “in the counsel of the ungodly” (Ps. 1:1). They were blinded by lies and flattery and completely out of touch with reality. There was no light in them (Isa. 8:20).

But is the situation much different in churches today? It alarms me the way professed Christians, who claim to be “Bible taught,” give their endorsement and support to people who are nothing but religious hucksters. You would think that the recent media scandals would wake people up, but such is not the case. “A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way,” wrote Jeremiah; and then he asked, “But what will you do in the end?” (Jer. 5:30–31, NIV) Indeed, we are facing a day of reckoning. Then what?

Tobiah kept sending letters to his informers, and they in turn kept telling people to change their allegiance before Jerusalem was taken by the Gentiles. Nehemiah ignored the letters and threats and kept on working until the job was completed. After all, his work was “wrought of our God” (Neh. 6:16); and when God begins a work, He completes it (Phil. 1:6).



The story began with “So I prayed” (Neh. 2:4). Then we read, “So I came to Jerusalem” (v. 11). “So they strengthened their hands for this good work” is the next link in the chain (v. 18), followed by, “So built we the wall” (4:6) and, “So we labored” (v. 21).

Now we reach the end of this part of the story: “So the wall was finished” (6:15). But this marks a new beginning, for now Nehemiah must protect what he has accomplished. How he does this is the theme of the rest of the book.

**Getz, G. A. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 685-687) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### *H. Nehemiah’s response to opposition against him personally (6:1–14)*

#### 1. THE FIRST SCHEME: ASSASSINATION PLOT (6:1–4)

6:1–3. **When ... Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem** (cf. 2:19), and other **enemies** heard that **the wall** was completed and that the only thing remaining was to **set the doors in the gates**, those “wall opponents” again attempted to halt the work. This time they were more subtle; their sole object of attack was Nehemiah himself. By removing him from the scene or by at least destroying his credibility with the Jews, they reasoned that they might be able to defeat the work. Each of their three attacks on him was different, but each was designed to take his life or discredit his effectiveness as a leader.

This first attack was more subtle than the others. **Sanballat and Geshem** invited Nehemiah to **meet** with them **in one of the villages on the plain of Ono**. The plain of Ono was named after the town of that name (cf. 1 Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37; 11:35). It was near Lod about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, about 6 miles southeast of Joppa. As seen on the map “Postexilic Samaria and Judah,” near Ezra 2, Ono was near the border of Samaria, Sanballat’s home province. On the surface it appeared that Sanballat and his cohorts wanted to have a peace conference, but their hidden motive was to harm Nehemiah.

Nehemiah suspected foul play. Why would they want him a day’s journey away from Jerusalem? Then he could not oversee the **work**, and by outnumbering him they might do him **harm**. Though he could not prove his enemies’ motives at the moment, he chose a method that would eventually demonstrate whether they were sincere. He simply **sent messengers to tell them** he was involved in **a great** (important) **project** and could not leave it unsupervised. By responding in this way Nehemiah was not openly questioning their motives. In fact he was giving them an opportunity to prove their motives were sincere, if they had really wanted to make peace.

6:4. Sanballat and Geshem’s response tipped their hand. Rather than countering with an offer to meet with Nehemiah in Jerusalem, **four times they sent ... the same message** and Nehemiah responded four times with his **same** refusal.

Nehemiah could have impatiently attacked their motives on their third or fourth request. But he patiently waited it out till *they* revealed their motives. And this they did with their fifth response, which involved their second scheme.

#### 2. THE SECOND SCHEME: SLANDER (6:5–9)

6:5–7. When Nehemiah’s enemies realized he would not leave Jerusalem and meet with them, they tried another tactic. They put pressure on him, trying to force him to meet with them in the plain of Ono. **Sanballat sent his servant to Nehemiah with an unsealed letter.** The letter reported an alleged rumor that Nehemiah was trying to set himself up as the **king of the Jews**, which in turn would be a threat to Artaxerxes (**the king**).

This letter was insidious in several ways. First, the letter made it seem as if they had Nehemiah’s welfare at heart. The letter implied that their reason for conferring with him was to protect him.

Second, and more basic to their motive, they were attempting to get Nehemiah to respond out of fear. Third, the letter may have contained an element of truth. Possibly some well-meaning religious leader in Judah had interpreted Nehemiah’s presence as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah-**King**.

6:8–9. Nehemiah’s bold response demonstrated his trust in God. He outrightly denied the accusation. He told his fellow workers that the letter was designed **to frighten** them into **thinking** their wall-building would bring Artaxerxes’ wrath down on them. Then, as Nehemiah regularly did, he **prayed**, this time asking God for strength.

### 3. THE THIRD SCHEME: TREACHERY (6:10–14)

6:10. Persisting in their evil planning, Nehemiah’s enemies then tried to destroy his credibility by luring him into **the temple**. They hired **Shemaiah**, a man “on the inside,” to propose a solution to Nehemiah. Claiming to be a prophet, he purposely locked himself in his house, supposedly from some debility or ritual defilement, and sent word for Nehemiah to visit him. Perhaps Shemaiah devised an urgent situation that would arouse Nehemiah’s curiosity.

Shemaiah must have been a man Nehemiah trusted, for it would have been illogical for him to meet secretly with someone he did not trust. When Nehemiah arrived, Shemaiah suggested they **meet in the temple** behind closed **doors**. He pretended to be protecting Nehemiah from would-be nighttime assassins.

6:11–14. Nehemiah discerned two flaws in Shemaiah’s so-called prophecy. First, God would hardly ask Nehemiah to **run** when the project on the walls was nearing completion. Second, no true prophet would ask someone to violate God’s Law. Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (Num. 3:10; 18:7). If Nehemiah, not being a priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God’s judgment. He would **not** disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. Nehemiah was convinced that Shemaiah was a false prophet, employed by **Tobiah and Sanballat** to trick him. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God’s commands. Once again Nehemiah prayed, this time that God would **remember** (see comments on Neh. 5:19) his enemies and judge them for their evil scheming. In this imprecation he also included **the Prophetess Noadiah**, mentioned only here, who with other false **prophets** was seeking **to intimidate** him.

#### *I. Nehemiah’s completion of the project (6:15–19)*

6:15–19. The walls were **completed ... in 52 days**, on **the 25th day of Elul**, which was about September 20. The project began in the last few days of July and continued through August and into September. The previous November–December (Kislev) was when Nehemiah first heard about the problem (1:1), and in March–April (Nisan) he presented his plan to the king

(2:1). As stated earlier, the trip to Jerusalem took two or three months (April or May to June or July), as long as or longer than the building program itself.

The enemies' **self-confidence** dissipated as they saw that the **work** was **done with God's help**. Opposing Him, they were fighting a losing battle! One reason **Tobiah** the Ammonite (cf. 2:10, 19) was able to make some inroads into Judah was that he was related to the Jews in two ways (also cf. 13:4). His father-in-law was **Shecaniah son of Arah** (cf. Ezra 2:5), and his daughter-in-law was **the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah**, who worked on two sections of the wall (Neh. 3:4, 30). **Many** Jews were therefore loyalists to **Tobiah**, perhaps having trading contracts with him, and they **kept** telling Nehemiah **good** things about Tobiah. Yet **Tobiah** tried to **intimidate** the governor-builder with threatening **letters**.

**Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 185-186). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

*Final Intimidation (6:1–19)*. With the work near completion, out of desperation Nehemiah's enemies entreated him four times to meet them at Ono, a site located between Judah and Samaria at the southern end of the Plain of Sharon. He refused on the grounds that the Lord's work was more important. Sanballat, frustrated by Nehemiah's refusals, stepped up his intimidation by charging him with sedition. Nehemiah responded with prayer as he had in the past. Sanballat hired Shemaiah and the prophetess Noadiah to give false counsel as though it were from the Lord. Shemaiah advised Nehemiah to take refuge in the temple because he might be assassinated that night. Nehemiah, however, saw the plot for what it was. He did not want such an act of cowardice to discredit him before the people. Again, Nehemiah prayed for God's justice.

The wall was completed after only fifty-two days because of the Lord's help. Ironically, the nations became intimidated by the success of the Jews, realizing that they had accomplished an impossible task. Nevertheless, Tobiah convinced some of the Jews to act treacherously by pressuring Nehemiah. Tobiah had close ties with Eliashib the high priest (see 13:4) and also had financial dealings among the Jews.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Ne 6:1-19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**