

Nehemiah: Rebuild and Renew

Lesson 5: Finishing Well

Key Verse: *"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days" (Nehemiah 6:15).*

Further Opposition to the Rebuilding (6:1-14)

- While the narrative of Nehemiah jumps back and forth between internal and external problems, the reality is that both challenges coexisted with one another.
- Even so, the building of the wall continued to progress until all that is left to complete was the setting of the doors in the gate (v 1).
- Even at this late date, the opponents of Nehemiah did not let up.
- Attempt 1: An Assassination Plot
 - o They sent a message to Nehemiah inviting him to meet in one of the villages in the plain of Ono (v 2).
 - o Ono was on the border of Judah and Samaria, the land Sanballat governed. It was about a day's journey from Jerusalem.
 - o On the surface, this invitation was meant to look like a peace conference.
 - o Nehemiah understood that they were "scheming to harm me" (v 2b) so he sent a reply saying that he could not meet with them while attempting to complete his building project (v 3).
 - o They persisted with this plan, their eagerness to get Nehemiah close to their land, an indication of their impure motives. They could have come to him.
 - o Nehemiah persisted in rejecting their invitation.
- Attempt 2: Slander
 - o When Nehemiah continued to rebuff their invitations, the opponents responded by sending a letter that is informing Nehemiah of a rumor they've heard in which Nehemiah is reportedly setting himself up as the king of Judah in an effort to rebel against Artaxerxes. They want to help Nehemiah with this situation, if only he'd come and visit with them in Ono.
 - o The letter is deceptive in many ways.
 - They are the origin of the rumor.
 - They act as if they have Nehemiah's interest at heart.
 - They play off of what must have been a genuine Jewish desire – to have a king that would overthrow the Persians – making the rumor plausible.
 - o Nehemiah responded with a strong denial and a pointed accusation that they were the source of the rumor, "You are making it up out of your head" (v 8).
 - o Nehemiah understood their motivations – they were trying to delay the work (v 9).
 - o Nehemiah continued to turn to God in prayer for strength and courage (v 9b).

- Attempt 3: Treachery
 - Nehemiah's enemies persisted in their opposition to his work by hiring an inside man, Shemaiah, to lure Nehemiah into a compromising situation.
 - The scheme involved:
 - Shemaiah locking himself in his house and calling for Nehemiah. Perhaps he feigned some kind of crisis.
 - He then informed Nehemiah of a plot by his enemies to come and kill Nehemiah (v 10).
 - His proposed solution was to hide themselves in the Temple of God.
 - Nehemiah smelled something fishy.
 - Only priests were allowed in the sanctuary (Numbers 3:10; 18:7).
 - If Nehemiah, a non-priest, entered the temple, he would have desecrated it and brought himself under God's judgment.
 - He rightly discerned that a sincere priest would never suggest such a thing. Nehemiah concluded that Shemaiah must be working for Tobiah and Sanballat.
 - Nehemiah once again turned to God in prayer asking God to remember his enemies for what they had done to try to intimidate him – that included external enemies like Tobiah and Sanballat and internal enemies like the priest Shemaiah and the prophetess Noadiah.

The Completion of the Wall (6:15-19)

- The wall was completed in mid-September in only 52 days.
 - It was the previous November-December when Nehemiah first heard about the problem.
 - It was March-April that Nehemiah took his concern to Artaxerxes.
 - It was in late June or early July that the work on the wall began.
- The completion of the wall made the enemies' hearts sink. They realized that God was behind the work and could not be opposed.
- In a side note that will be important later in the story, Tobiah continued to work different angles, drawing on his familial connection to people in Jerusalem.
 - His father-in-law was Shekariah son of Arah (Ezra 2:5).
 - His daughter-in-law was the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah (Nehemiah 3:4, 30).
 - These family members kept lobbying Nehemiah on Tobiah's behalf.
 - All the while Tobiah kept attempting to intimidate Nehemiah (v 19)

Sources

- Derek Kinder, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Academic, 1979).
- Gary V. Smith, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022).
- Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation (Louisville KY: John Knox, 1992).