

# BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

## Ezra Nehemiah Esther

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### Text

Nehemiah 6:1-19

### Topic

Nehemiah's enemies attempt to halt the work on the wall in a series of vicious personal attacks – including inviting Nehemiah to meet them in the villages of the plains of Ono, where they could kidnap or kill him.

### Title

*No Go Ono*

Nehemiah 6:1 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), Nehemiah 6:2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

Nehemiah 6:3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

Nehemiah 6:4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah 6:5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.

Nehemiah 6:6 In it was written:

It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, *that* you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.

Nehemiah 6:7 And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "*There is* a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

Nehemiah 6:8 Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart."

Nehemiah 6:9 For they all *were trying to* make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, *O God*, strengthen my hands.

Nehemiah 6:10 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who *was* a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."

Nehemiah 6:11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

Nehemiah 6:12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

Nehemiah 6:13 For this reason he *was* hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Nehemiah 6:14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Nehemiah 6:16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

Nehemiah 6:17 Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of* Tobiah came to them.

Nehemiah 6:18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Nehemiah 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

## Introduction

It was a Friday night in October of 1995. A Letter to the Editor was published in the Hanford Sentinel. Here are a few excerpts from it:

Spiritual abuse is when a person submits himself spiritually to the authority of a pastor and the pastor takes advantage... Many times the leader is subtle, or so charismatically charming that it takes a while to figure out he has fallen out of alignment with God's character. A Hanford church was convenient for me, so I attended there... But after a time, I began to see the pastor as a one-man show, full of arrogance with boastful pseudo-intellectualism, even though he taught correct doctrine. When trying to contact him during the week, I found he was unavailable and was warned not to call his house... I noticed people who approached him after the service [were] shown little love or compassion... There is much more to being a pastor than just good teaching. That church is cold because the ice is on the top and is working its way down.

In case you haven't realized it yet, **the letter was about me!** I did like the part about being "charismatically charming."

The open letter in the newspaper was part of a long campaign of attacks. It followed a private letter that had been mailed to everyone in our Church directory describing the characteristics of spiritual abuse. The private letter was typed on forged Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa stationary, purporting to be from Pastor Chuck Smith, asking everyone to write him with their complaints so that I could be removed from the ministry.

Needless to say, our text this morning was a great comfort to myself and my family during that period of time. (As were the comments about me being 'charismatically charming!').

Letters are prominent in our text. They were part of a larger campaign against Nehemiah. Nehemiah's enemies used two major tactics against him:

1. They tried a series of **scare tactics**, which included the private and public letters they wrote.
2. They tried a **sin-tactic**; they tried to get Nehemiah to fall into sin in order to ruin him.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Fear Your Enemy's Scare Tactics, and #2 Don't Fall For Your Enemy's Sin-Tactics.

#### #1 Don't Fear Your Enemy's Scare Tactics (v1-9 & 17-19)

The first series of attacks against Nehemiah were designed to make him afraid. Fear cancels out faith and paralyzes your work for God.

Nehemiah refused to succumb to fear and overcame their attacks. You can do the same.

Nehemiah 6:1 Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and *that* there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),

The wall was solid and would repel any direct assault. The unfinished gates were the last hope that their enemies had of keeping Jerusalem vulnerable.

If you think of the Lord, and His Word, as a foundation for the Church on earth, then you realize it is solid and will always repel any direct assault. Jesus told us that He would build His Church, and that the forces of Hell would not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18).

The Lord enlists us as builders in His Church. Though the foundation is sure and solid, there can be gaps in the building if we are not doing our part. Thus we can expect our enemies to try various scare tactics to get us to put down the trowel.

Nehemiah's enemies tried to scare him:

Nehemiah 6:2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

At best, the journey itself would cost Nehemiah several days – at least half a week. At worst, they might kidnap or kill him.

It was a scare tactic because it would seem rude or wrong for Nehemiah to refuse. Maybe you receive an invitation; or are cornered by a sales pitch; and suddenly you're put on the spot. You want to say "No," but you are afraid because of what others might think.

Nehemiah 6:3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

Nehemiah 6:4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

They kept hassling him; he kept refusing them. His focus was on the work at hand.

**Your** work for God is a **great work**. It might be the raising of your children; submitting to your husband as unto the Lord; loving your wife as Jesus loved and loves the Church. It might be your witness at

work, or in school. It might be a formal ministry in the Church. It is a **great work** because it is for God.

Spiritual enemies never surrender. They know you can win the battle, but lose your victory. Nehemiah's enemies took their game to the next level.

Nehemiah 6:5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand.

Nehemiah 6:6 In it was written:

It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, *that* you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.

Nehemiah 6:7 And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "*There is a king in Judah!*" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

This was potentially devastating. Persian kings took these charges seriously. Sure, it was filled with lies; but it might cause trouble.

Maybe Nehemiah should meet with them? *Nope! Not a chance!*

Nehemiah 6:8 Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart."

Nehemiah 6:9 For they all *were trying* to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

He remained determined to press forward. Notice the three things that encourage determination:

1. Integrity is the first. Nehemiah was not guilty of the charges. It's important that you be blameless. If you're blameless of the charges, then God's opinion is the only one that matters.
2. Discernment is the second thing to notice. He discerned that it was all a scare tactic. Ask God to develop within you the spiritual instinct you need to discern His will in such matters. Then have the courage to act upon the discernment God gives you.
3. Dependence is the third thing to notice. Nehemiah prayed, showing he was dependent upon God for help and strength.

If what you are being accused of is not true; if God shows you clearly what is really going on; then you can trust Him to get you through it.

Nehemiah said, **they... were trying to make us afraid**. The attacks against him were personal; but they involved everyone in the congregation. They were designed to cast doubt upon Nehemiah among the Jews building the wall. Phase two of their scare tactics was about to kick-in.

Drop down to verses seventeen through nineteen.

Nehemiah 6:17 Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and *the letters of Tobiah* came to them.

Nehemiah 6:18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Nehemiah 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

Even though an enemy of the Jews, Tobiah was held in high esteem by many of the Jews because of family ties. Tobiah either wrote Nehemiah threatening letters; or he forwarded to Nehemiah the concerned comments of those he was influencing against him.

Sometime in your walk with the Lord, you can expect a letter or letters. Not about me; about you. Many of you have already received them; some of you have shared them with me. They are almost always anonymous, but they are attacks against you.

If not letters, you can expect rumors, as people you work with try to influence others against you.

Don't become distracted by such scare tactics. You're doing a **great work** and it must move forward. Your family and your Church family need you to keep troweling. Your fellow employees or students need you to fill the gap in the wall with your witness for Jesus.

## #2 Don't Fall For Your Enemy's Sin-Tactics (v10-14)

Nehemiah would not fall for their scare tactics; but maybe they could get him to fall. They set out to entrap him into sin.

Nehemiah 6:10 Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."

It was unlawful for a layperson like Nehemiah to go into this area of the Temple. It was against the Law of Moses, and was punishable by death.

They weren't just trying to make Nehemiah look like a fraidy-cat; they were trying to get him to fall into sin.

Nehemiah 6:11 And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who *is there* such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

Nehemiah would not entertain any notion of saving his own life by sinning. His life belonged to God. If God allowed these men to succeed with their plot, so be it.

It reminds us as believers that our lives do not belong to us. We should not be motivated by things like the quality of our lives; or our own dreams and desires. If we truly want to save our lives – and by that I mean see them count for something – then we must lose them every day by offering ourselves to Jesus as living sacrifices.

Nehemiah 6:12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced *this* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

Nehemiah 6:13 For this reason he *was* hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so *that* they might have *cause* for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

Several prophets had been enlisted to falsely prophesy against Nehemiah. Yes, *there can be false prophecies!* Just because someone says they are speaking for God, it doesn't mean that they are. People will say things like, "God told me..." this or that; or, "God



showed me...” this or that. If what God supposedly ‘told’ them or ‘showed’ them is not Scriptural, *then it wasn’t from God!*

Shemaiah is a good example. He claimed to be prophesying to warn Nehemiah of the death threat and to flee into the Temple. But God would never speak something through a prophet that was contrary to His revealed written Word. And He won’t do that today, either.

[Nehemiah 6:14](#) My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Nehemiah gave it to God. His prayer includes an insight. Two insights, actually:

1. First, Nehemiah mentions the [works](#) of these false prophets. We talked about the need for judging their words, to make sure what is being said lines up with the Bible. That can be tricky! Sometimes the rumors being spread about you might seem plausible. Look at the [works](#) of these false prophets. Are they behaving godly by spreading rumors? Are they behaving godly by drawing you into their group of disgruntled enemies? You get the idea.
2. Second, Nehemiah said their goal was to inspire fear. We base things on the Word, not on our feelings. But if a person is telling you things that destroy rather than build-up; if they are telling you things that incite your fleshly reaction, rather than the fruit of the Spirit; then they are not speaking for God.

Maybe nothing in this passage so far has had much personal application to you. You’ve never received such a letter or letters; you’ve never been the subject of a vicious campaign of attacks.

Then concentrate on this last point, about sin-tactics. You are surrounded by sin-tactics – things that the enemy of your souls has constructed in order to get you to fall into sin and ruin your witness at home... At work... At school... In the Church. As I mentioned earlier, your enemies never surrender. You may win the battle, but still lose your victory to one or more of their tactics.



Be as watchful after the battle as you were before it.

### Applying the Word

We skipped verses fifteen and sixteen, reserving them for our conclusion:

Nehemiah 6:15 So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth *day* of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Nehemiah 6:16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.

It was a remarkable achievement. What the Jews before them had not been able to accomplish in about one hundred years, this group accomplished in a mere fifty-two days.

It was costly. The famous first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, records that many Jews were killed during this time. All of them were attacked spiritually. But they persevered.

If you want to defeat your enemies, then persevere. Just keep working for the Lord. At home... At work... In school... In the Church.

Yours is a **great work** if it's for the Lord.

- being changed to bring change -

