



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Nehemiah 6:1-14

Topic

Nehemiah's enemies ask him to go to the plains of Ono where they intend to do him harm

Title

*"No Go Ono"*

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If I asked you, I'm pretty sure you could name several **walls** that have been prominent in history:

- The Great Wall of China.
- Hadrians Wall in England.
- The Berlin Wall.
- The Walls of Troy.
- The Walls of Babylon.

In the US, we have the Market Theater Gumwall in Seattle. This is from Wikipedia:

The wall is by the box office for the Market Theater. The tradition began around 1993 when patrons of Unexpected Productions' Seattle Theatresports stuck gum to the wall and placed coins in the gum blobs. Theater workers scraped the gum away twice, but eventually gave up after officials deemed the gum wall a tourist attraction around 1999. Some people create small works of art out of gum.

I haven't been there, but I have visited the gumwall in San Luis Obispo. The one in Seattle was named one of the top 5 germiest tourist attractions in 2009.

What do you think is the germiest? I'll give you a hint: You kiss it. It's the Blarney Stone.

Getting back to the more significant walls, the Western Wall, *a.k.a.*, the Wailing Wall, in Israel, is a must include on any list. In 2017, 3.6million visitors were counted at that site.

In our verses, Nehemiah was almost finished rebuilding the ruined wall surrounding Jerusalem.

He said, “there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates).”

A wall without doors in the gates leaves a city vulnerable to attack. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that many Israelites were killed by their enemies during construction.

In order to draw current application from these historical accounts, it’s good to reduce the story to a simple representation:

- Nehemiah was the man of God in the city of God on the earth and was vulnerable to attack from his enemies while the building proceeded.
- We are the people of God in the church of God on the earth and are vulnerable to attack from our enemies as building proceeds.

One thing Nehemiah and those of us in Christ have in common is that we can be described as “[waiting] for the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). That city isn’t Jerusalem.

It is the New Jerusalem described in the Revelation as “coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2).

Nehemiah’s physical situation in chapter six is representative of the spiritual situation all believers find themselves in on our pilgrimage to New Jerusalem. We are not yet in our walled and gated Golden City; we are vulnerable.

Seeing how Nehemiah handled the particular attacks against him will help us meet our enemy at the gates in the strength of the Lord.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1 Your Defense Is To Live Your Life In The Lord’s Strength, and #2 Your Defense Is To Lose Your Life In The Lord’s Service.

#1 Your Defense  
Is To Live Your Life In The Lord’s Strength

(v1-9)

I know what you’re thinking: Didn’t Jesus say that the gates of Hades would not prevail

against His church on the earth (Matthew 16:18)?

He did; they won't; they can't. But on the heels of making that very promise, Jesus talked about discipleship. He said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (v24-25).

The gates of Hades cannot "prevail" is promised in the context of us living for the Lord, and losing our lives for Him. It is in a context of sacrifice and suffering. Keep that in mind as we learn from Nehemiah.

Neh 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),

Why did these guys hate Nehemiah? Simply put, they were unredeemed, fleshly men. Whether it was bigotry, or prejudice, or envy, or jealousy, or covetousness... They were dominated by their flesh - by their unredeemed humanity.

When you are struggling with people who are against you, realize it is their nature. The solution is their salvation.

Nehemiah was constantly working on the wall. When he wasn't working on it, he was thinking about it.

Jesus is constantly working on you. It behooves you to cooperate with Him, to build with Him, as He changes you from glory-to-glory into His image.

Neh 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.

Don Corleone told his son, Michael, “So, Barzini will move against you first. He'll set up a meeting with someone that you absolutely trust, guaranteeing your safety. And at that meeting, you'll be assassinated.”

That is what Sanballat and Geshem had in mind for Nehemiah.

Neh 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?"

I find it interesting that Nehemiah pointed to the work. I mean, why didn't he say, “Guys, I know you're plotting to do me harm, so ‘Thanks, but No Thanks.’ ”

It could have been diplomacy, but I think something else is to be gleaned from his response. It really was “the work” that took priority. I think Nehemiah would have answered a friend who meant him good this same way.

It's really easy to get distracted away from growing in the Lord. Not always by sinful things, although that is a constant threat. By good things, fun things, that begin to take too much of your time and attention. Things that are permissible for you may not be spiritually beneficial to you (First Corinthians 10:23).

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

There was nothing more to say.

People will try to wear you down when it comes to Jesus and the Gospel. You have the answer, there's nothing more to say; but they want something else.

See what you think of this discussion, titled, *How Do I Counsel Unbelievers?*, taken from a Christian Counseling site:



**You cannot counsel unbelievers.** Don't even try. When you work with believers, your resources are vast; the Spirit and the Word operate to bring about change. Unbelievers have neither power at work in them. Moreover, the Christian counselee possesses a regenerate nature capable of understanding and appropriating biblical truth. Again, that is something the unbeliever does not have... Then, what should you do to help unbelievers? The Bible tells you to... **evangelize them.** [They call it pre-counseling].

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

Neh 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.

Neh 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.

None of these things were true; but you could see how they might be true. It was sinister.

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. 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.*** And I have to say, it's true: I am "charismatically charming."

The open letter in the newspaper was part of a longer 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. To quote Archie and Edith Bunker, "Those were the days."

Neh 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."

"I sent to him." Nehemiah answered privately. He didn't answer in kind, publicly, fighting for public opinion.

Bear in mind that this was God's strategy for Nehemiah in his particular circumstances. When reading the Bible, we like to come to definite conclusions on what to do in every situation. But since every situation is different, we should be looking more at our heart than the happening. Nehemiah remained focused on the Lord, and acted with the strength of meekness.

If I get treated like Nehemiah, I want to counter, and go on a campaign. It might be necessary to respond; but I think too often we are reacting in our flesh, when it is just as likely God wants us to say nothing.

Neh 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.

Fear is a weapon formed against you. Fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of what people think, fear of rejection, fear of the boss, fear of the medical test results - all interfere with the

work Jesus is performing in you, and through you.

Lift out of that list “fear of the medical test results.” It might be normal; it might be abnormal. Which it is will define the path you are on; maybe for the rest of your life.

*But you're still on the path walking with the Lord - learning that His grace is sufficient for you.*

**Whether** abounding, or being abased, the Lord is your strength.

#2 Your Defense  
Is To Lose Your Life In The Lord's Service

(v10-14)

Losing your life for the Lord as His disciple; we think mostly of daily sacrifices at home or at work or in school.

For multitudes of believers, it means something more.

In January of 2018, *Newsweek* claimed that “Christian persecution and genocide is worse right now than any time in history.” The report they cited said, “Saudi Arabia was the only country where the situation for Christians did not get worse, and that was only because the situation couldn’t get any worse than it already was.”

In September of 2017, *Foreign Policy Magazine* published an article titled, *We Are Witnessing the Elimination of Christian Communities in Iraq and Syria*.

If you are ever called upon to be martyred, you can trust the Lord for His sufficient grace to strengthen you. The point is that the gates of Hades cannot prevail against you - especially in death. Jesus has conquered death. You die victoriously.

Neh 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 helps to remember that no one but the priest was allowed in the Holy of Holies. It would be an egregious sin for Nehemiah to flee there. It would at the very least disqualify him for leadership.

Neh 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!"

Certainly Nehemiah wasn't boasting about being a great man. What he seems to be getting at is that God would not give such counsel to His servant.

God rebukes; He exhorts; He corrects. But His words are seasoned with grace. There are things He would not say; and ways He would not say them.

It's common in some Pentecostal circles for believers to claim they have "personal prophecies" for you from God. I've had a few personal prophecy projectiles pronounced on me. They are always harsh and judgmental; and they don't come true. Test the words by Scripture, and also by the nature of God.

Neh 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.

Neh 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.

It isn't always a word of prophecy that people use to undermine you.



Sometimes it's Bible doctrine; by which I mean a systematic theology that claims it is the one, true way of interpreting Bible doctrine. Instead of evangelizing the lost, these guys go after believers, to convert them to their system. They play on fear.

Neh 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.

Shemaiah wasn't the only hireling. But no matter how many people say something that is false, it doesn't become true.

Nehemiah wouldn't flee to save himself; not to the Holy of Holies, and not anywhere. He was quite willing to perish if that should be the Lord's will.

The apostle Paul said, "according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so

now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better” (Philippians 1:20-23).

If that’s your honest attitude, you’ll have no problem losing your life daily while serving the Lord at home, at work, and in school.

**We** mentioned the Western Wall in Jerusalem. You might recall that Jesus famously predicted of the Temple, “not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). How, then, is the Western Wall still standing?

The Western Wall is a retaining wall built by Herod the Great to increase the size of the Temple complex.

The disciples pointed to the “buildings” of the Temple - *not* to the foundation (Matthew 24:1). The prophecy was fulfilled to the letter in 70<sup>AD</sup>.

The greatest wall, and its gates, is coming. It’s our home, New Jerusalem.

Rev 21:10. And he... showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

Rev 21:11 having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

Rev 21:12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

Rev 21:13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.

Rev 21:14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Rev 21:15 And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.

Rev 21:16 The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.

Rev 21:17 Then he measured its wall: one hundred *and* forty-four cubits, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

Rev 21:18 The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass.

Rev 21:19 The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,

Rev 21:20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.

Rev 21:21 The twelve gates *were* twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass.

Rev 21:22 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

Rev 21:23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

You have an address there - if you are in Christ.

If you're not a believer; if you've never been born again; the Holy Spirit is here to free your will to receive Jesus Christ.