

**March 16, 2025**

## **Nehemiah 6:1-14**

1 Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), 2 Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” But they intended to do me harm. 3 And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” 4 And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. 5 In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. 7 And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.” 8 Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” 9 For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands. 10 Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.” 11 But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.” 12 And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. 14 Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Scriptures for further study:

Genesis 3:1-5

1 Peter 3:15

“I believe that one of Satan’s most effective deceptions is having local churches fixate on growth, preoccupying them with the business of gathering as many people as possible, regardless of how they do it. For Satan then tricks the Church into altering its gospel invitation, the content of biblical faith, and causes it to relax on discipline and meaningful discipleship. Satan delights in church growth that isn’t gospel driven and faith that superficial.”

-Werner Hamukoto



### **The Hand of God To Strengthen Nehemiah 6:1-14**

**BIG IDEA:** In a world that seeks to deceive in order to destroy, let the church stand in faith by seeking a strength outside of herself through prayer.

Prayer neutralizes that which seeks to deceive and destroy.

#### **OUTLINE**

##### **1. Deception**

##### **2. Destruction**

##### **3. Standing in Faith**

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Have you planned a surprise for someone? What did you have to do in order to keep the surprise a secret?
2. Refer to Nehemiah 6:1-7. How did Sanballat and Geshem attempt to deceive Nehemiah? How does Satan attempt to deceive the church (refer to the quotations by Werner Hamukoto & Justin Poythress)?
3. Refer to verse 10. What did Sanballat and Geshem plan to do by deceiving Nehemiah? Where else in the Bible do you see plans of deception which are meant to destroy? How can hypocrisy harm the church? (refer to the quotation by Justin Poythress)
4. Reflect on 6:1–14. Observe Nehemiah’s process for standing in faith (refer to verse 9 and 1 Peter 3:15). What can you learn from his various responses (refer to the quotations by John Calvin, Oswald Chambers, and Tim Keller)?

“Believers do not pray with the view of informing God about things unknown to Him, or of exciting Him to do His duty, or of urging Him as though He were reluctant. On the contrary, they pray in order that they may arouse to seek Him, that they may exercise their faith in meditating on His promises, that they may relieve themselves from their anxieties by pouring them into His bosom; in a word, that they may declare that from Him alone they hope and expect, both for themselves and for others, all good things.”

-John Calvin

“The hypocrisy that others find repulsive is when the church proclaims to be a grace-filled place, but in reality only has grace for people who look and talk like them...The real power of the gospel is that it welcomes and accepts the self-righteous. But it also requires that they admit their self-righteousness and ask God for forgiveness and grace to change...Visitors will quickly sense whether your church is a place where members are still eager to grow, change, and be confronted, or whether that’s only something they’re eager to do for other people.”

-Justin Poythress

“This world will become a better place, but God’s people must first become the better place that God called them to be on behalf of this world...yet, if we’re not careful, we may become so focused on gaining the world that we lose the church— and then, ultimately, we’ll lose the world, too.”

-John Nugent

“Whenever the insistence is on the point that God answers prayer, we are off the track. The meaning of prayer is that we get hold of God, not of the answer.”

-Oswald Chambers

“[Paul] does not see prayer as merely a way to get things from God but as a way to get more of God himself... conversation with God leads to an encounter with God...prayer turns theology into experience. Through it we sense His presence and receive His joy, His love, His peace and confidence, and thereby we are changed in attitude, behavior, and character.”

-Tim Keller

***Praise to Jesus.*** Praise God for good news! Jesus Christ, through His life, death, and resurrection, has brought us to God. We have fellowship with God through Him and the means by which we access that fellowship and transforming presence is prayer.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Spend time in confession and repentance. Confess and repent self-righteousness and hypocrisy.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** From 1 Peter 3:15, Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. In Ezra and Nehemiah, we find the Hand of God reaching down, and we grab hold of that infinitely strong hand through prayer. In a world that seeks to deceive in order to destroy, let the church stand in faith by seeking a strength outside of herself through prayer.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story now swings back to the external threats to the building project. The heroic actions of Nehemiah unfold as follows: Nehemiah stands up to the intended trickery and the bullying tactics of Sanballat and Tobiah (vv. 1–9); Nehemiah also rejects the intended trickery of false prophets planted by the enemies in the Jewish community (vv. 10–14).

-ESV Literary Study Bible

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. From verse 1, what led the enemies of the Israelites to try once again to get them to stop rebuilding the wall? In this passage, how many times did Israel's enemies try to get them to stop rebuilding? (They heard that the wall was rebuilt and that there were no holes in the wall. The enemies knew that if they let the wall be completely rebuilt, the only way to regain control would be to start a war. The enemies try five times to send messages to get Nehemiah and the Jews to stop. This reminds us that God's enemies are persistent.)

2. What was Nehemiah's reaction and answer? (He stayed focused on the calling of God to lead the rebuilding project of the wall and didn't let the enemies distract him from this. In verse 3, he called his work that God gave him "great work" 6: 3. Remind your children that Nehemiah had a very important job with the King of Persia, and he left that to go to Jerusalem. The nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem were not significant places in the Persian Kingdom. But Nehemiah's God-centered view of life reminded him that he was doing God's work, which is indeed "great work.")

3. What is the work that Christians are called to do as God's people? (Matthew 28:18-20 is called the Great Commission, and it is the call to make disciples of all the nations or people groups. We are to stay focused on this as we are at home, school, a friend's house, or anywhere.)

4. We have seen throughout this book of Nehemiah that he is a man of prayer. Where do we find Nehemiah's prayers in this passage? What does he pray? (We find short prayers in 6:9 and 6:14. If you want to review his other prayers, then you can have your children read 2:4, 4:4, 4:9, and 5:19. He prayed in verse 9 for God to strengthen his hands. And in verse 14 he prayed for God to remember what his enemies had done. He is not praying for God to remember because God didn't know about it or forgot about it. His prayer to remember is asking God not to allow the enemy's actions to go unpunished. In other words, in the Bible, when God remembers something, it comes with His actions. One great example is from Exodus 2:24, when God remembers the cries of His people in Egypt and remembers His covenant with them. This indicated that He was about to move to rescue His people.)

5. Have you been tempted to be discouraged? (This is one of the most widely used tactics of God's enemies. The enemies seek to tear down God's people and get them to be discouraged to give up.)

Scriptures for further study:

John 16: 33

Philippians 4:4-7

Ephesians 6:10-20

## FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

John 16:33

Ephesians 6:10-20

Hebrews 12:1-3

1 Peter 5:8-9

1. In Nehemiah 6:1-7, Sanballat and Geshem repeatedly try to deceive Nehemiah. How do they attempt to distract him from his mission? How does this compare to the ways Satan tries to deceive and distract us from following God?

2. Read Nehemiah 6:9-10. What was Sanballat's plan to stop Nehemiah? Can you think of other stories in the Bible where deception was used to try to stop God's people? What are some ways deception can pull us away from trusting God?

3. Nehemiah responds to opposition with faith and prayer (Nehemiah 6:9, 14). How does his response encourage us to stand firm when we face challenges or discouragement? Read 1 Peter 3:15—how can we be ready to stand firm in our faith like Nehemiah?

4. Read Nehemiah 6:12-14. How did Nehemiah recognize that Shemaiah was not actually speaking for God? What can we learn about discernment when it comes to recognizing false messages in our own lives?

5. Nehemiah prays for strength in verse 9. When have you needed God's strength to keep going in a difficult situation? What can you do this week to rely on God instead of giving in to fear or discouragement?

## FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Here, we see just how desperate Sanballat, Tobiah, and others are to make a last-ditch (and persistent) effort to stop Nehemiah and his building project. Notice both the number and variety of tactics: trickery, intimidation, fear, diversion, lies, temptation, etc.

Question: How are these enemies of Nehemiah much like our ultimate enemy, Satan? How have you seen the enemy use these same tactics in your own life? And how successfully have you resisted him?

2. Sanballat and others focus their efforts on bringing down Nehemiah, the leader of the Jews.

Question: Why do you think the enemy often does the same thing with church leaders and other spiritual leaders today? How can you support and pray for your own church leaders right now?

3. In verse 12, Nehemiah “realizes” that Shemaiah was not speaking on behalf of God but rather was working for the enemy.

Question: Knowing what is right often requires a lot of discernment on our part. How do we go about deciding whether a particular idea or course of action is the right one? (Notice that Shemaiah wants to entice Nehemiah to stop trusting in God and also to do something unlawful, which would have been contrary to God’s word. These are just two litmus tests we might also use to help us discern something. What are some other ways?)

4. As always, Nehemiah ends this episode with a prayer for God to strengthen his hands. Not only does he resolve to do the right thing, he also resolves to leave the results to God.

Question: When we face opposition from people (or circumstances) in our lives, how is Nehemiah’s example a great example for us to follow? (See Romans 12:19)

## The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



*The Ancient of Days*, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)



## Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address; <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)