

Don't Fight, Don't Hide, Just Build: Nehemiah 6

Sunday, July 2, 2023
Covenant Church
Pastor Zack Phillips

Nehemiah 6

¹ Now when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah and to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had built the wall and that there was no gap left in it (though 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 in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. ³ So 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 to come down to you?" ⁴ 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 this report you wish to become their king. ⁷ You have also set up prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'There is a king in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these words. So come, therefore, and let us confer together." ⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done; 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 One day when I went into the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his house, 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, tonight they are coming to kill you." ¹¹ But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" ¹² Then I perceived and saw that God had not sent him at all, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He was hired for this purpose, to intimidate me and make me sin by acting in this way, 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.

¹⁵ So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem; for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. ¹⁷ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah: and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence, and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

A. Introduction

Four plots: to kidnap? (vv. 1-4) to malign (vv. 5-9), to intimidate (vv. 10-14), to undermine (vv. 15-19). Let's talk about enemies...

A lot can be said! We are to love enemies (Matt 5:44) and to turn the other cheek (Matt 5:38-42)... but we don't have to invite harm (and can avoid it!) (see Luke 4:29-30), don't have to *literally* turn the other cheek (see John 18:22-23 and Acts 23:2-5), and can/should morally engage our enemies.

Today's passage teaches us one aspect about living with enemies in our lives...which can be put three ways:

B. Builders Not Warriors

1. Don't be a Zealot or an Essene

Burning with "zeal," Phineas (Num 25:1-9) and Matthias of Modein (1 Macc 2:23-26) killed those who opposed God's purposes, and "Zealots" instigated Jewish war with Rome in 66-73 and 132-36 A.D. Nehemiah rejects zealotry in favor of building God's kingdom:

"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to come down to you?"

Fearing contamination, Essenes retreated to Qumran (?) to maintain a pure faith. Nehemiah rejects retreat because he has (Someone Else's) work to do:

"Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!"

2. Don't let enemies define you or derail your work

3. Be a builder not a warrior

Like Nehemiah, Benedict of Nursia (480-548), William Wilberforce (1759-1833), and many, many other saints-like-us!

Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?