



Nehemiah - Chapter Six

II Nehemiah 3:1-7:4 - The Wall Is Built, Despite Difficulties (continues)

Summary of Chapter Six

Nehemiah's enemies try to scare him into ceasing the work, but he is not deterred and the wall is finished.

II.d Nehemiah 6:1-7:4 - A Conspiracy Against Nehemiah, but the Wall is Finished

Refer to the chapter summary above.

II.d.i Nehemiah 6:1-14 - Intrigues of Enemies Foiled

Four times Sanballat and his associates invited Nehemiah to meet them outside of the city but he knew it was a trap and he did not go. They then sent a letter accusing him of setting up a king in Jerusalem to rival the king of Persia but this was false and Nehemiah wrote back to refute it. Finally, one of the Jews tried to get Nehemiah to hide in the temple claiming that the opponents were coming to kill him but he spoke falsely as he had been hired by the opposition and Nehemiah did not go into the temple to hide.

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.

Nehemiah 6:1-2

With the wall almost complete, Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of our enemies turn in desperation to trickery, knowing that they cannot overcome the Jews by direct assault.

I had built the wall and that there was no gap left in it. The wall was almost finished - the gaps were closed, but the gates were not yet in place. For the enemies of Nehemiah and the work of God, this was a ‘now-or-never’ time. If they did not do something immediately to stop the work, the walls will be completely finished and the city secure against attack.

Come and let us meet together. At this time, Sanballat and Geshem tried to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah - by appearances, a friendly meeting, perhaps even reconciliation or much needed rest from the work for Nehemiah. Their invitation may have had the sense of a break for a few days of rest and relaxation out on the plain of Ono.



Judæa under Persian Rule 538-332 BC

Under Persian rule, the lands of Israel (now called Samaria) and Judah (now called Judæa) were minor provinces within the satrapy called Beyond the River. Returning Judæans settled mostly in the province of Judæa, but a few

settled in the plain of Ono and Idumæa as well. The fact that the plain of Ono lay outside the jurisdiction of Judæa may explain why Nehemiah suspected that the other local governors intended to do him harm there.

The villages in the plain of Ono is a place called Hakkephirim in the Hebrew. This unknown location is presumably near the town of Ono north of Jerusalem, perhaps serving as a kind of neutral ground. Ono was one of the places mentioned as belonging to some of the original returnees; refer to Ezra 2:33.

Ono was originally a Benjaminite city and was built by a descendant of King Saul: <<*The sons of Elpaal: Eber, Misham, and Shemed, who built Ono and Lod with its towns*>> (1 Chronicles 8:12).

But they intended to do me harm. Nehemiah was equipped to see through the outward appearance, and to understand what Sanballat's friendly offer was all about. He saw it as a conspiracy against him since he knew they wanted to frustrate his work.

Nehemiah was equipped with discernment. Discernment is the ability to judge matters according to God's view of them, and not according to their outward appearance. People are often deceived by outward appearances: <<*But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'*>> (1 Samuel 16:7). Many people confuse being discerning with being negative or cynical; but discernment is just as able to see the good where others might miss it as it is at seeing wrong where others might see good according to the outward appearance.

Christians today suffer a great deal because they lack discernment. They follow leaders and teachers who give a good appearance, but do not walk in the nature of Jesus or teach correctly from the Word of God. They accept things blindly because it looks good or sounds good, without carefully judging it against the whole counsel of God's Word, something the Bereans were keen to do: <<*That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea; and when they arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue. These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so*>> (Acts 17:10-11). Christians might even picture Nehemiah going to the Word of God and equipping himself with discernment, which is a Spiritual gift. Perhaps he read the wise words of Solomon: <<*Well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy*>> (Proverbs 27:6). That passage alone would remind him to not look to outward appearances but to judge soberly.

How can a Christian develop discernment? Firstly, if they want to see things as God sees them, they must get to know his Word. Secondly, discernment comes through spiritual maturity; Hebrews 5:12-14 says that discernment is something spiritual babies do not have, i.e. a baby will stick anything in his mouth. Thirdly, discernment can be given as a gift from the Holy Spirit: <<*To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues*>> (1 Corinthians 12:8-10). It would be much more useful to both individual and the church if more people asked for gifts like discernment than the self-edification of speaking in tongues.

Without discernment, people can mistake a dangerous invitation from an enemy as an offer of reconciliation. They can think presumption is faith. They can think their own noble desires are God's promises. They can think God is saying 'now' or 'later' when he is really saying 'later' or 'now.' They can think someone is a great person or a spiritual leader when they are really doing damage to God's people.

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?'

Nehemiah 6:3

I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Nehemiah would not divert time and effort from the Lord's work for discussions with his enemies that he knew would be fruitless at best and probably dangerous to him as well.

If the enemy can distract God's people, then he has won. Nehemiah was persistent in his discernment; the request came four times and each time Nehemiah stood fast and did not fall for it.

Discernment also gave Nehemiah focus; he knew what God wanted him to be doing and he did it. He would not be sidetracked by things that may have sounded good but were not of the Lord for him. Anyone doing a work for God must contend with a hundred different noble causes and a hundred things that might look good - and be good - but they are not what they are called to do at that time. Discernment provides focus.

⁴ They sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

Nehemiah 6:4

I answered them in the same manner. Nehemiah follows diplomatic protocol in the exchange of letters. Sanballat was, after all, the governor of Samaria and relations with him would ultimately be important.

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.’

Nehemiah 6:5-7

Sanballat’s fifth attempt was an open letter, its public nature intended to exert extra pressure on Nehemiah, perhaps by creating fear within his own community that his actions could lead to disaster. In the letter, Sanballat takes up the old allegation of rebellion against Persia: *<<And now may it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. Now may it be known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be reduced>>* (Ezra 4:11b-13), and claims to have testimony to it among the nations, i.e. in the surrounding Persian provinces.

It is reported among the nations – and Geshem also says it. Sanballat’s slander began the way many verbal attacks do, as a report of what others have reportedly said. Vague accusations often sound like ‘Everyone is talking about’ or ‘A number of people are saying.’ Such vague words can very easily give the wrong impression. What Sanballat accused Nehemiah of was false. If a thousand nations reported it, it would not make it true. A popular lie may be more dangerous, but it is no more true because it is popular.

You and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. You wish to become their king. There is a king in Judah. These are lies and false accusations. If this charge were true, it would certainly inflame the Persians. And there was truth, of course, in the Jewish expectation of a coming Davidic king, based on prophetic promises: *<<For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his*

kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this>> (Isaiah 9:6-7), and: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'*>> (Jeremiah 23:5-6). A century earlier, Zerubbabel may have excited messianic expectations; refer to the comment made on Ezra 2:1-2a. Sanballat portrays himself as loyal to Persia and also as a friend to the Jews, offering to defuse the danger posed by these alleged rumours.

These lies probably outraged Nehemiah. He had worked hard and trusted God greatly so this work would be done with the blessing of the king; and he had embraced great personal sacrifice to demonstrate that he was not in this for himself. And Nehemiah would never dream of going to 'rent a prophet'! Now he is accused of the very things he has worked so hard to not fall into! Christians may as well accept it: the devil knows their which buttons to press. He knows those lies, those accusations, which really get to a person and he knows how to throw them back in the face. Christians cannot stop it, so they have to learn how to deal with it!

It will be reported to the (Persian) king. This is, of course, a veiled threat. Nehemiah would not be deceived into coming to this meeting to avoid the repercussions of such a report being sent to the king.

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.

Nehemiah 6:8-9

No such things as you say have been done. Nehemiah flatly denies the accusations made in vv.6-7. While he may have held long-term messianic hopes, as many no doubt did, he remained a loyal servant of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah had no aspirations to kingship nor indeed a claim to it, since there is no reason to think he was of the Davidic line.

You are inventing them out of your own mind. Nehemiah replied by calmly and straightforwardly telling Sanballat that he was a liar and by carrying on with the work. Nehemiah did not mount an elaborate defence, trying to prove Sanballat wrong point by point. He was not going to waste his time. Men like Sanballat are not satisfied with facts, explanations and evidence. They are only satisfied by giving in to their demands and Nehemiah would not! Sanballat would not be

defeated by being told he was a liar. He did not care if the whole world thought he was a liar if he could only cause the work would stop. But Nehemiah was steadfast!

For they all wanted to frighten us. Nehemiah saw the real intention of Sanballat's manoeuvring and expresses the issue at stake: the work cannot be prevented by the schemes of enemies – that had been settled from the start because the favour of the king himself had been secured by God's providence. Nehemiah acknowledged this fact by another prayer interjected into his narrative.

Nehemiah had the discernment to see the slander strategy was all about fear and he would not give in to it. No enemy can make a believer afraid; all they can do is try to make them choose fear but it is up to each individual to choose it. Many people live paralysed by the fear of what others are saying about them or what they might say about them. Instead, they should forget about it in these situations. People will talk anyway and there is little a person can do about it other than be determined that they will not become afraid of it.

But now, O God, strengthen my hands. God's people must do what Nehemiah did - pray for God's strength, for his power in their lives. Only then can they overcome the slander and fear of their enemies in their own strength. It will be said: <<***Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts***>> (Zechariah 4:6b).

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.'

Nehemiah 6:10

Shemaiah son of Delaiah is not otherwise known but may have been a priest, which explains his proposal for a meeting in the temple, perhaps a second meeting from the one mentioned here. This man Shemaiah was said to be a prophet: <<***he had pronounced the prophecy***>> (v.12), but he was not. Shemaiah offered Nehemiah a safe haven in the temple. The idea was that although Nehemiah was said to be threatened, he could find refuge in the temple. It sounded reasonable - and one might even take some Scripture to support it: <<***Let me abide in your tent for ever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings***>> (Psalm 61:4). Nehemiah needed discernment now more than ever.

Confined to his house. This possible translation of a difficult Hebrew word tries to explain why Nehemiah went to this man's house. It is not clear why he had been confined to his home: perhaps it was meant as a prophetic symbolic act suggesting that Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies.

Let us meet together in the house of God. Shemaiah knew how to use religious talk but it was still a trap. If Nehemiah had believed Shemaiah's religious talk, he would have sinned and given others something to find fault with and discredit him with.

Within the temple, for they are coming to kill you. This warning suggests a plot by Sanballat and other enemies. Shemaiah proposes that Nehemiah simply take refuge in the temple.

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!'

Nehemiah 6:11

Should a man like me run away? Would a man like me go into the temple to save his life? Nehemiah responded that such an act would be cowardly and also sacrilegious. Nehemiah, knowing the heart of God as it is revealed in the whole counsel of God's Word, had discernment. Shemaiah tried to create fear in Nehemiah and tried to get him to disobey God based on this fear.

According to God's law, only priests were allowed in the temple and Nehemiah was not a priest: <<*But you and your sons with you shall diligently perform your priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and the area behind the curtain. I give your priesthood as a gift; any outsider who approaches shall be put to death*>> (Numbers 18:7). He would have been disobeying God if he had done what Shemaiah suggested. In 2 Chronicles Chapter 26, King Uzziah - who was not a priest - went into the temple, offered incense, and God instantly struck him with leprosy. This meant that he had to spend the rest of his life in isolation and his son had to rule the nation in his place.

There were other examples from history that Nehemiah could have followed in this regard but none of them would have been seen as good examples: <<*Adonijah, fearing Solomon, got up and went to grasp the horns of the altar. Solomon was informed, 'Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon; see, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, "Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not kill his servant with the sword."' So Solomon responded, 'If he proves to be a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the ground; but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die'*>> (1 Kings 1:50-52), and: <<*When the news came to Joab - for Joab had supported Adonijah though he had not supported Absalom - Joab fled to the tent of the Lord and grasped the horns of the altar*>> (1 Kings 2:28).

I will not go in! Nehemiah remained strong against this religious deception. In his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah, who was no true prophet. Instead, he was on Sanballat's payroll.

Shemaiah's actions, whether as prophet or priest, would not have surprised Nehemiah: <<For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely>> (Jeremiah 6:13), and: <<Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading>> (Lamentations 2:14). Christians are likewise informed today: <<False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect>> (Mark 13:22), <<But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves>> (2 Peter 2:1), <<Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world>> (1 John 4:1), <<And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet>> (Revelation 16:13).

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.

Nehemiah 6:12

God had not sent him. Shemaiah was pretending to speak with prophetic authority but Nehemiah knew that his prophecy was false: <<Because you have disheartened the righteous falsely, although I have not disheartened them, and you have encouraged the wicked not to turn from their wicked way and save their lives; therefore you shall no longer see false visions nor practise divination; I will save my people from your hand. Then you will know that I am the Lord>> (Ezekiel 13:22-23).

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.

Nehemiah 6:13

To intimidate me or to be afraid would be in this case the opposite of having faith and hence sin: <<Where are we heading? Our kindred have made our hearts fail by reporting, “The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large and fortified up to heaven! We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!”>> I said to you, ‘Have no dread or fear of them. The Lord your God, who goes before you, is the one who will fight for you, just as he did for you in

Egypt before your very eyes, and in the wilderness, where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, just as one carries a child, all the way that you travelled until you reached this place. But in spite of this, you have no trust in the Lord your God, who goes before you on the way to seek out a place for you to camp, in fire by night, and in the cloud by day, to show you the route you should take’>> (Deuteronomy 1:28-33), refer also to the comments made on Ezra 3:3 and Nehemiah 4:14. This sort of unbelief would enable his enemies to taunt or discredit Nehemiah and thus undermine his authority: <<For I hear many whispering: ‘Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!’ All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. ‘Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him’>> (Jeremiah 20:10).

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.

Nehemiah 6:14

Nehemiah thinks again of prayer, calling on God to remember those who had tried to turn him and therefore also his fellow Jews from faith: <<*If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea*>> (Matthew 18:6). This remember is typical of Nehemiah’s prayers: <<*Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples”*>> (Nehemiah 1:8); refer also to the comment made on Nehemiah 5:19, which always seek God’s justice, whether for blessing or for judgement.

Instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, he simply committed these wicked men and the entire situation to God. If God could take good care of Nehemiah, then he could take also take care of Shemaiah according to divine wisdom and purpose.

Tobiah is placed first again here but the circle of Nehemiah’s enemies, including the prophetess Noadiah and other prophets, must have been considerable. Perhaps there were many incidents such as the one recorded here.

“Come down to the plain of Ono,” they had said to Nehemiah. But they said to Jesus, “come down from the Cross.” However, Jesus was doing a great work - the greatest work ever performed - on the Cross and would not be stopped. They slandered Nehemiah but he did not defend himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also slandered and did not debate his critics - he spoke the truth and trusted in his Father in heaven. A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out but it was a way of fear and disobedience. Nehemiah would have none of it. Jesus was also offered a way out of dying on

the Cross from Satan. All Jesus had to do was worship Satan and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to him, or so the lie promised. Jesus would have none of it.

II.d.ii Nehemiah 6:15-7:4 - The Wall Completed

Not only was the rebuilding of the wall complete but the gates also were now in place and guards were set. This caused great fear among the nations for the work had been completed in just fifty two days and they knew that it was the will of the Lord. Yet there were even those in the city who were conspiring with opponents.

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.

Nehemiah 6:15-16

Elul was the sixth month, i.e. August-September, so it has been less than six months since Nehemiah had spoken to the king. No doubt the speed of the building work itself contributed to the fear now felt by the enemies.

The amount of time it took to finish the job was remarkably short. The walls were in ruins for more than 100 years and then they were rebuilt in a period of only fifty two days. Why was the job not undertaken and completed sooner, perhaps in the years of the first return under Zerubbabel and Jeshua? It was not that no one saw the problem; it was not that walls were not wanted. Many people saw broken walls, knew how they ruined the lives of the people of Jerusalem, but no one got past the place of just wishing there were walls. Finally, there came a man who did more than simply wish that Jerusalem had walls; he grieved, he ached, he prayed, he planned, he asked boldly, he went, he fought, he encouraged, he stood strong, he saw the job through to completion. However, he also had people around him with the same kind of heart. God used a man named Nehemiah to correct a one hundred year old problem in less than two months - and the same God sits on a throne in heaven and works through ordinary people even today.

At the beginning, when he saw the need, Nehemiah prayed for four months - the difference in time between Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1. However, the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than they needed to complete the work. This shows the spiritual battle was actually greater than the material battle. Christians are often told this but it can be hard to believe at times!

All our enemies among the nations around us surely include Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and their associates.

They perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. If God had helped the people of Judæa so remarkably in this way, the nations feared that this same God would turn Judæa into a powerful nation that would be a threat to them.

Their enemies were disheartened not just because the wall was finished but especially because it was evident that God had effectively done the work; this same view was echoed by Rahab in Jericho when the Israelites first arrived in the Promised Land: <<*Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men: 'I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you'*>> (Joshua 2:8-10). When something has the fingerprints of God on it, all his opponents notice it also. The enemy is only disheartened when God does the work. If it is the product of man's efforts, he just laughs. People might be fooled when they see a work of man and be impressed by it, but angel in heaven and every demon in hell know what has been done by man and what has been done by God. A strong, secure people of Jerusalem were a witness to surrounding nations. Many Christians live lives that no one takes notice of because their walls are broken down. Let the Lord do the work of building and others will soon notice.

¹⁷ Moreover, in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

Nehemiah 6:17

The complicity of the nobles of Judah with Tobiah now strongly emerges; it is an alliance based on the marriages of Tobiah, an Ammonite according to Nehemiah 2:10, and his son into families of the Jewish nobility. It is ironic that Tobiah is so highly regarded among the Israelites, in view of the measures Ezra had taken against intermarriage; refer to Ezra Chapters 9-10. This perhaps explains Tobiah's hostility to Nehemiah's work, which was seen as being in continuity with Ezra's work.

Tobiah was the man who had opposed the rebuilding work with Sanballat. In Nehemiah 2:10 he was disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls. In Nehemiah 2:19 and 4:3 he mocked Nehemiah's work. In Nehemiah 4:7 he was angry that the work was being done. In v.1 above he was one of the men who tried to get Nehemiah to stop the work and come to the plain of Ono where he could be attacked and finally dealt with.

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.

Nehemiah 6:18-19

For many in Judah were bound by oath to him. It is not clear in what way they were bound. However, there was clearly a powerful lobby in Jerusalem committed to Tobiah and opposed to Nehemiah.

The nobles of Judah had no trouble being friends with such a man because he had family ties to many in the tribe of Judah. In fact, they tried to recommend him to Nehemiah, i.e. they spoke of his good deeds in my presence. These Jewish brothers of Nehemiah could not see what was so plain to Nehemiah. Perhaps they did not see much of the evil work of Tobiah firsthand, so they had a hard time believing it. The reader can imagine them saying, “He’s always been nice to us; look at all the good he has done.” It is also possible they just did not have the shepherd’s heart and shepherd’s eyes that Nehemiah had. Nehemiah was called by God to protect God’s people and God’s work; he was watching and on guard in a way that others were not. Also, in the case of these nobles, there was self-interest at work. They had financial dealings with Tobiah they wanted to protect.

Undoubtedly, these nobles saw Nehemiah as ‘the bad guy’ for he had only recently made them repay the interest they had taken from loans made to the poor and they had had to restore land back to them. They figured Tobiah’s deeds were good, and Nehemiah spoke some strong words against Tobiah; in Nehemiah 4:4, Nehemiah prays that the evil Tobiah had planned should be turned back upon him and that he be captured and carried away. Nehemiah had to be willing to be seen as the bad guy in order to do what is right by the people of God. He could see what the nobles of Judah could not. He knew that Tobiah’s good deeds were not the whole story - all the while, Tobiah was sending frightening letters to Nehemiah. Those letters were not one of Tobiah’s good deeds.

And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me. Nehemiah wrote no more about this situation. He was not going to demand the nobles change their minds about Tobiah; but he was not going to deny what he knew to be true about Tobiah either. He seems willing to let it go and let God take care of it. Nehemiah had work to do and that work was not really going out to attack people like Tobiah. He could leave the Tobiah’s of this world alone as long as they were not attacking the work of God.