

## Nehemiah Chapters 5-6 John Karmelich

1. Let me open with my title: "The Ripple Effect". It literally refers to the idea that when one drops a pebble in water, it ripples waves on the water surface. In a symbolic sense, it's about what occurs when we take an action. Let me give explain that a little better: This book focuses on an effort for people in Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In these two chapters we learn that project does expose problems that existed and must be dealt with. There were also external problems with the nations around them that were bothered by the fact the Jerusalem walls were being built. In short these two chapters focuses on how Nehemiah as deals with internal and external problems as the leader of those Israelites. In Chapter 1 he traveled to Jerusalem essentially with the order to build those walls. By the end of Chapter 6, the walls are built. We discover he was made the governor over Jerusalem as well as the surrounding area. Bottom line, these chapters show a "ripple effect" of what Nehemiah started (rebuilding the city walls) and how he dealt with that issue.
  - a) OK John, this would be interesting if I lived in Israel 2,500 years ago. Time to hit us with a "Why should I care" lecture! The answer is anytime we take on a project there'll always be some sort of ripple effect. What I mean is other issues come up due to what we do want to accomplish. It could be side effects, problems that already existed that are now hitting the surface or simply dealing with those who don't want us to accomplish, what we believe is God's will for us to do at that moment.
  - b) Nehemiah in these chapters has to deal with all of that. He deals with locals with power, who are taking advantage of others. (I'll just say the bible has rules against Israelites who charge interest to other Israelites.) We also get "ripple effects" as normal work isn't being done due to the big project being done in this book. Then there are Israel's enemies who don't want Nehemiah to succeed and let's just say they try a few tricks to get him and the Israelites to abandon the rebuild Jerusalem project including making false accusations to Nehemiah himself.
  - c) Bottom line is these chapters get ugly as they deal with problems while the main project that Nehemiah came to Israel to accomplish was trying to get done.
  - d) The chapter isn't all bad news. We discover by the end of Chapter 6, the project is done. I promise to explain why there are seven more chapters in the book, but again the key point is the walls are built and the job is done in Chapter 6.
2. All of this leads us back to the "why should we care" question. No it's not about learning a history lesson of ancient Israel. The issue is about how we are to handle problems that arise. We will see both internal (within the Israelite community) and external problems come up in these chapters. I want us to see how Nehemiah handles these issues, which are great lessons in leadership. Realize Nehemiah isn't perfect. Still these chapters give great lessons in how we're to deal with problems when they occur. I'm not saying the "Nehemiah way" is the only way to solve problems. He does give us some biblical examples of how to deal with problems and how to deal with them in a way that's pleasing to God. Therefore, I encourage you to study this lesson again, not to learn ancient history, but to have a biblical perspective on how to deal with issues as they arise. Realize here in these chapters, we'll get everything from false prophets, to enemies, to local problems that had to be dealt with such as a lack of food and people going into debt to complete this project!
  - a) Let's put it this way: The issues we'll read of in these chapters would make anyone want to throw their hands in the air and say, "Lord, I can't deal with all of this. If it's Your will to get this project done, you have to take over!"
  - b) Yet we never read of Nehemiah doing that. Despite internal and external issues, he makes the best decisions he can, leads by example, helps those who are truly suffering and even deals with Israel's enemies and false prophets in ways that make good examples for us to follow. By the way, Nehemiah knowledge of the bible (to date) also came in handy, as it helped him recognize that the prophet was a false one! Keep that in mind.

3. With all that said, let me give the "scorecard" of the events of this chapter. Chapter 5 pretty much deals with the "internal" problems (in that community) while Chapter 6 focuses on external ones.
  - a) Chapter 5 opens with both men and women complaining that they're "out of money". We read of them saying they had to mortgage what they owned just to get food to eat. They'd borrow also to pay taxes. In that culture, if one didn't have money to pay, one would turn their children over for "payment for work". Bottom line is the work to effort to finish that wall was in danger of stopping due to a "debt crisis".
  - b) Nehemiah called a meeting with the "rich" and told them the Jewish law doesn't allow the charging of interest on loans. Let's just say a problem was occurring between lenders and the borrowers and it wasn't good. Nehemiah applied the lenders not only with God's law but also with practical issues. If Israel's enemies realize they can't take care of themselves, it's an opportunity for others to "step in". If that wasn't enough, Nehemiah was placed as the leader there, so they also needed to "obey or else". The text uses the word "usury" and that implies high interest rates. Think of it as "loan sharks" taking advantage of those who had no other options to pay their taxes or simply get food to eat.
  - c) Anyway, Nehemiah got tough on them. Apparently he too lent to people and charged an interest rate. Bottom line is they all agreed to drop the loans, help the people have food to eat and therefore, make it possible for them to finish the wall project.
  - d) The last part of the chapter got personal for Nehemiah. He lists the number of people who dined with him. He compares to previous leaders in that community. In effect he said the previous Israel governors demanded a high tax to maintain their style of living. I am not doing that, as I just want enough to survive and finish what I have been called to do, that is, the walls of this city.
  - e) Bottom line again, the "internal problems" were resolved. Time to deal with external ones.
4. Chapter 6 gets back to some people we met in earlier chapters. For those who haven't read any of my previous lessons, I'll make this really quick: Israel was divided into two kingdoms for about a few hundred years. The North one got conquered a century prior to the South one. When "North" died, the residents were scattered through an empire called the "Assyrian Empire". The Assyrians made it a practice of separating everyone so families or groups wouldn't rebel. It means "North" became a "half-breed" of Israelites and other nations. They became the Samaritans who were the big enemy centuries later in Jesus time. When the Babylonians conquered "South" they inherited everything the Assyrians had as they conquered that empire. Then the Persians conquered all of that, and now all of Israel is under Persian control with "Religious Jews" in the southern part and the Samaritans in the north. Understanding who the Samaritans are is important for this lesson.
  - a) This is important as the leaders there along with those across the Jordan realized God was allowing this city to be rebuilt. They tried to get Nehemiah to meet them at a neutral part of Israel to "talk some sense" into him. That failed. Then these guys accused Nehemiah of wanting to make himself to be "The Messiah" and rebel against Persia. Since I've already made this story way too long, the point is the effort failed the "Bad guys" went home as it was a success as far as Nehemiah's mission.
  - b) Speaking of "the mission", we learn that Nehemiah finished the walls in 52 days. It was in the summer of 445 BC if you care. He stayed in Jerusalem for a total of 12 years before he returned to the Persian capital. There's more to it, but that's essentially the good news of these two chapters.
  - c) One more "bottom line": The desire to rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem were accomplished. That city was now a "true" city again. We'll get more into what happens next in the later chapters of the book.
  - d) For now, it's time to go through some of these details, as again the "ripple effect" gives us lessons on how to best deal with internal and external problems we face as we go through our own lives. We never read of Nehemiah panicking or giving up which is a good lesson for us as we deal with our issues. OK then, time for details.

5. Chapter 5, Verse 1: Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup> Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." <sup>3</sup> Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." <sup>4</sup> Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards." <sup>5</sup> Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."
- a) As we go through these two chapters, again, keep in mind Chapter 5 focuses on "internal" issues (those within the Jewish community in and near Jerusalem), while Chapter 6 deals with issues with "outsiders". A logical guess is this isn't in pure chronological order. It is not logical that the issue was just "x" and then the issue was just "y". It had to be in effect at the same time. Keep in mind we're going to learn that this entire building project was done in less than two months. Bottom line these two chapters deal with problems that do occur while the 52 day period was going on.
  - b) With that said the first issue brought up is some Jewish people (men) and their wives did complain they couldn't afford to buy food. Again, I'm speculating, but I suspect this is the people who weren't actually doing the work. A picture of bunch of men and women who came to Nehemiah and said in effect, "Stop building the wall, everyone around here is out of money and we're all starving!" Bottom line is this is a financial problem.
  - c) People tend to think the bible doesn't have anything to say about money. In truth there is hundreds of verses on money, many of which are in the Proverbs. As my regulars know, just because we're Christians doesn't mean life will be "stress free" or not have issues such as financial problems. Everything we go through in life, God's well aware of and he does allow it if for no other reason than to trust in Him during such times. The people I know who are the most financially successful, usually had the discipline to not spend all they've earned and managed to save and invest parts of it wisely. That's the most important piece of advice I can give about money, and obviously there's a lot more to say about that.
  - d) Speaking of money, the Israelites were hurting badly. When you have to mortgage all you have just to pay the taxes, you know you're in a world of hurt!
  - e) The text says there was a famine. I believe all famine's are "God allowed". Still none of us know how and when bad times will hit, just that the cycles come to most people. I would argue that God allowed this famine to get the Israelites attention to point out the fact that those with money were "abusing" their power.
    - i) Let me explain that one better. Verse 7 says that the landowners were charging a rate that the text calls "usury". Think of it as very high interest (loan shark) rates. It was a case where the poor farmers were saying, "we need money and there isn't anyone we can borrow from except the "loan sharks". Deuteronomy 23:19 prevents the charging of interest from one Jewish person to another. So does that mean if a banker is Jewish, he can't make a home loan? I'll let scholars debate that one. I am sure it applies to "usury" rates and that's the issue here.
    - ii) Do I think that's why God allowed the famine to "surface" that issue? Possibly. It's going to make Nehemiah deal strongly with it in a few verses.
  - f) Before I move on, what if we're dealing with serious debt? I'm not talking about our home mortgage but literally borrowing more than we can afford. There are lots of good services out there to help people in such situations. The short version is "If you've dug yourself in a hole, rule one is to stop digging". Then work slowly to alleviate the problem.
  - g) What if all of this doesn't apply to me? Then we may meet someone who has to deal with a serious debt issue. We can point to bible verses like this as to say, "There's nothing new under the sun" to use an old cliché.
  - h) All of this leads to one final issue about debt I need to bring up here:

- i) That is the issue of debt and slavery. The bible never allowed slavery just for the sake of slavery. God didn't "kill it" as a concept because it was so commonplace. Instead God made it "difficult" to be a slave owner. For example slaves had to be set free after a certain number of years. Realize it was devout Christians that did bring an end to the slave trade, so let's just say it was meant to end.
  - ii) As far as slavery in this case, the issue was debt. If one had no assets to pay off a debt, one could sell their children to pay off the debts. Yes the slave owners were required to treat them humanely, feed them, clothe them and provide shelter. It is still a "prison like" experience. Slavery was so common in the ancient world. That is what we read about here in these verses as well.
- i) Anyway, now we know the problem. Let's read how Nehemiah dealt with it next:
6. Verse 6: When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. <sup>7</sup> I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them <sup>8</sup> and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.
- a) In Verse 6 Nehemiah was angry when he heard all this. I suspect he was so busy working on the wall, he was unaware of other problems going on in the community. As I've been taught, our projects rarely cause problems, they just "come to the surface" when we least want to deal with it. That's the situation here.
  - b) Instead of just "lashing out" at the nobles and officials, the first thing Nehemiah did was to ponder it. In other words, he spent some time thinking about this and the implications of possible actions he could take. Keep in mind these are the "people in power" in the area. I would think that Nehemiah would have to approach it carefully. The one bit of power he had over them was "God". Even the officials were interested in their eternal security and I would argue in Jewish thought, it's not about believing in the Messiah, but about obeying the Jewish law to the best of their ability. To state the obvious, those leaders couldn't get around the fact they violated Deuteronomy 23:19 which clearly states usury isn't allowed. It is especially true for fellow Jewish people.
- c) With that said, let's get into details about how Nehemiah handled the situation:
7. Verse 9: So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? <sup>10</sup> I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! <sup>11</sup> Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them--the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil."
- a) When you are arguing against helping people in the "pocketbook", one has to appeal to a higher source! Nehemiah is trying to talk people out of getting rich by demanding a high interest rate from people around them. The "nobles" were getting rich by doing this. If it is to be stopped, one has to appeal to a higher source. The vast majority of people worry about their eternal destiny. These nobles were Jewish and did believe God existed and it is just a "matter of time" before they will be judged. Therefore that's the method we read of Nehemiah using to appeal to them.
  - b) Stop to consider the "why" first: If Nehemiah didn't do this, the Israelites wouldn't want to finish the wall, as they'd all want to work on something "profitable" to make the payments to these nobles. Like all people the "Nobles" were interested in money. So if Nehemiah is saying, "give them their money back because I want to finish the wall", they'd probably be laughing Nehemiah out of the room. We'll discover later the "Nobles" had connections to the Samaritans, so the money appeal wouldn't have worked. That's why Nehemiah went the "God route". It's a good lesson to us when we're faced with a tough situation, we have to think what motivates the other party, and not just what we want!

8. Verse 12: "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!" At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.
- a) Bottom line, Nehemiah got what he wanted, the "Nobles" (those who charged "loan shark" rates to their fellow Israelites cancelled the debt. It doesn't mean everybody had an equal income now. It meant the "townsfolk" could continue to build the wall without having to worry about having food to eat or enough money to pay the taxes.
  - b) Nehemiah did a nice physical gesture. He shook his robe as if to imply, "May God shake out anyone who refuses to keep his promise (of canceling the usury rates).
  - c) On a side note, I'm a big believer that every book of the bible has patterns and types that speak of Jesus. What did God do for us, cancel our debts that we can't afford to pay. Yes we read of Nehemiah "canceling the debt" not because he had the power, but he appealed to God's laws and said, "this isn't right". Could I be seeing too much into that? Maybe, it's just an interesting way of looking at the text!
  - d) The important thing is the "loan sharks" agreed to do this. Remember that Nehemiah was the governor at this point. Nehemiah could "raise a stink" with the Persian officials. That's also why it was in the "Nobles" (OK, I like loan shark better) interest to agree to all this in spite of their financial loss!
9. Verse 14: Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year--twelve years--neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. <sup>15</sup> But the earlier governors--those preceding me--placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. <sup>16</sup> Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.
- a) Speaking of being "governor", Nehemiah talks about it a little here. We also discover that he was in the land of Israel a total of 12 years. So when the queen asked when will he be back (Chapter 1), I guess the answer was "a little over a decade".
  - b) Anyway, Nehemiah compares himself to the previous governors. Those men required a bunch of money from the locals (i.e., an additional tax) to support their lifestyle. Then we read in Verses 15-16 that Nehemiah didn't act that way. I don't know how he paid his bills but he didn't tax the people to support his lifestyle whatever that was.
  - c) Instead, Nehemiah realized God called him there to rebuild the city and then try to get the Israelites to focus on worshipping God consistently the way He desires we do. The rest of the book will focus on issues affecting our worship of God. In the meantime, Nehemiah is talking about "Being governor" mainly to say, "despite my title, despite how previous men acted in this role, I'm here to build a wall and I'm sticking to my job" no matter what.
  - d) So why tell us all of this? Why is it in the bible? Because when God calls us to do a job, He will often go silent to test us to see if we stick to what He calls us to do. Nehemiah's style is not to brag, but to lead by example and again, stick to what God calls us to do.
    - i) That of course, leads to the important question: What does God require of us (over and above believing Jesus is God)? The simple answer is to use our lives as to be a witness for Him. From there I love to ask, "What spiritual gifts do you have as well as what do you enjoy doing" and finding ways to use one's gifts for His glory. The bible actually answers the question of what God expects of us. The essential point is to do justice, walk humbly before God and have mercy (From Micah 6:8). What I am saying is to live as God desires we live (which is what the bible teaches) and make the best decisions we can as we glorify Him with our lives.

- e) So why did Nehemiah mention the fact he didn't acquire any land? I suspect it's to show he didn't "tax to death" anyone or require any "loan shark" fees. It's his way of saying he's not guilty of the sins others had committed. OK, let's continue:
10. Verse 17: Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. <sup>18</sup> Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.
- a) Being governor means regularly hosting other dignitaries. There also had to be staff that he had to deal and work with. Here we learn the "food requirements" needed in order to be a governor. Why? Again, he's trying to prove that he hasn't been a burden to Israelites even though he's appointed as their local leader. It's Nehemiah way of proclaiming of his innocence of the "crime" of being a "loan shark" that among other things was making it an impossible situation for people to finish the wall.
- b) Let's be honest, anytime we take on a project for God, there's a "ripple affect". We can't be earning an income if we're busy volunteering on a project like that. We should never fail to be grateful for those who financially back such efforts. As I love to say, 'If we're not on the front line firing the bullets, we have to be on the back line providing the ammunition'. Bottom line is Nehemiah showed some great leadership skills among the Israelites as he's working to complete the project God called him to do.
11. Verse 19: Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.
- a) As you read through the bible, one gets a glimpse of the individual styles of the writers. I would say that Nehemiah is the kind of guy who likes to point out what he does for God. I know it's not the most humble method, but it was his personality, and God works with it as it is. Yes we could read it as an example of using our lives to make a difference for God and Nehemiah just wanted to point that out. Personally I see it as a "humble brag" as He's contemplating all he's done as the project is being finished.
- b) Enough of that. Enough of the internal issues Nehemiah dealt with. Let's look "external".
12. Chapter 6, Verse 1: When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it--though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates-- <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; <sup>3</sup> so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" <sup>4</sup> Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.
- a) Let's begin by explaining who these three characters are. We got introduced to them (ok, two of the three) back in Chapter 2. What may help is to keep the "S's" together. Sanballat is the head of the Samaritans. For those who don't know, they're a half breed of Israelites and Gentiles who lived in Northern Israel. Tobiah was the head of the Amorites. That's in the northern part of what is today Jordan. "Geshem the Arab" is a new character and he is probably a leader of Arab tribes that lived to the south of Israel.
- b) Bottom line, all this means that Jerusalem's surrounded by people who want the Israelites wiped out. (Gee what's changed in history!) So in their mind, why are the Israelites being a threat? Yes we know the demonic argument. What I suspect the other reason is they do fear Israel being a powerful nation as it was at times in it's history.
- c) Anyway, these three leaders gathered for a "pow-wow" shortly before the wall project got done. So if they were that ticked off, why not a physical attack? It's because Nehemiah is a Persian government appointed official. All of that area was under Persian rule. Since it was not in their best interest (i.e., the Persians will come down on all of them) for any type of physical war, the only hope to stop this project was either to discourage the Israelites or claim to the Persians the Israelites were going to rebel. Both those threats are in Chapter 6.

- d) Anyway, these three local leaders got together to figure out how they could get the wall project put on permanent hold. They decided let's call Nehemiah to a meeting on neutral ground. A "village near Ono" is essentially neutral ground between Samaria and the area near Jerusalem and associated with those Israelites who returned since Ezra's time.
  - e) The text said they tried to arrange this meeting four times? Why the repetition? First It is because Nehemiah refused to leave the building project for any meeting. Why four times? I suspect they were simply trying to wear Nehemiah down. It's the old idea of trying over and over again until one wears down the other side. Anyway after four tries, they needed a new plan. All that leads to Verse 5.
13. Verse 5: Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter <sup>6</sup> in which was written: "It is reported among the nations--and Geshem says it is true--that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king <sup>7</sup> and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: `There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."
- a) As I said a page back one of the tactics was to accuse Nehemiah of a desire to be the king of the Jewish people. These enemies understood enough about Judaism to realize they do believe in a Messiah and they were accusing Nehemiah of thinking "he's that guy". No I'm not saying Nehemiah thought he's the Messiah. I'm saying that's the false accusation. It is in effect to try to get the Persians to come down hard on them.
  - b) Notice Verse 5 said "an unsealed" letter. That means they wanted the messengers to state that message publicly. The idea was for these false rumors will work their way to Persian leaders and they'd come down hard on Nehemiah and the wall.
  - c) Remember the goal of the three enemies was for the Israelites to stop the building project. They feared a powerful Israel and they knew Nehemiah was tight with the emperor. This is in effect a last ditch effort to get this project to stop.
  - d) If you didn't read my first lesson on Nehemiah the "spiritual" aspect is Satan doesn't want any effort to draw people closer to God. That's because Satan knows his time to rule has a time limit. Only God knows what that time limit is, but it's based on "x" number of people being saved. Think of it this way, will heaven have a limited or unlimited number? Yes it is limited so there has to be a final one! Therefore, I'm sure Satan is working behind these three guys as Satan doesn't want a strong Israel. Thus the conflict. (Which reminds me, it is obvious to me why the world is so "hell bent" on Israel's destruction as that destruction delays the time of Jesus return!)
  - e) Bottom line, without a physical war breaking out, we see the leaders of the areas around Israel working to try to "kill" this project.
  - f) Before I move on, if the wall is so important, why did God allow it to get destroyed again, by Rome to give one example? Because God's always interested in His people drawing in any effort gathered to worship Him. It's not for His ego. It's because that makes us a good witness for Him and truthfully more joyful as people when we use our lives to honor Him as God. OK, enough of that, back to Nehemiah.
14. Verse 8: I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head." <sup>9</sup> They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."
- a) Nehemiah's basic response (keeping it clean) "You're making it up!" Realize this is done in a public way. Nehemiah was probably telling those around him, "Hey everybody this is a big effort to scare us into stop working. I don't know about you, but I don't see Nehemiah as a supervising type. I picture him with bricks in hand building the wall himself. Here's another good example of how he lead by example. He encouraged the works while he did make the public statement about.

- b) Notice Nehemiah didn't just rely upon his ability to lead or "outsmart" his enemies. That's why the last part of Verse 9 mentions a quick prayer by Nehemiah. It's the reminder that even when things are going well, we must still be dependant upon God. Keep in mind he (Nehemiah) is dealing with a "powder keg". These are leaders of nations equal or greater in size than the Israelites. He knew the charges against him were false, but it still required diplomacy. In fact we'll discover soon, that some of the local nobles intermarried with the Samaritans so the situation is a bit complicated. The simple point is when in doubt ask for guidance. God wants us to be a good witness for Him. Regularly and constantly seeking Him reminds us who's in charge and who's guiding our lives.
  - c) By the way, this section is a good lesson in dealing with false charges. Nehemiah made a public statement in effect to say "it's not true". He didn't run away from the accusation as he faced it head on and stated the truth. His "actions spoke louder than words". If he was interested in being a "king", why did he turn down the "big governor salary" that previous leaders had? I'm just saying we should always use our lives as a witness for God. Yes we will mess up, but one gets the idea here.
  - d) Meanwhile, time to deal with a false prophet.
15. Verse 10: One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you--by night they are coming to kill you."
- a) OK, who is this "Shemaiah dude" and why should I care? First, we'll find out he was hired by the Samaritan leader (Sanballat) and the Ammonite (think Jordanian) named Tobiah. It is interesting that whoever Shemaiah was, it intrigued Nehemiah enough to stop building the wall to visit the guy. Who knows maybe word got to Nehemiah that this guy required a visit. Bottom line is Nehemiah went to his house, which we assume is in Jerusalem. The text says this guy was "shut in his home". We don't know why, so we'll leave it that. That is why I suspect Nehemiah was intrigued. He heard this guy couldn't leave his house and he wanted to find out way.
  - b) What Shemaiah said in effect is "we're both in danger, let's go hide in the temple". That bit of news made Nehemiah's "antenna go up". Why? For starters, he wasn't a priest so he is not allowed to be in the temple. Second if this guy is "bound in his house why do both of them have to go there? My simple point is the way to tell a false prophet (as Jesus said) is by the fruit they bear (Matthew 7:15-20). John's translation: If someone states something that's contrary to what the bible teaches it's a sign of a false prophet. We'll discover all this in the next set of verses. To say go hide in the temple, is non-biblical to put it mildly!
16. Verse 11: But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" <sup>12</sup> I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup> He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.
- a) By Verse 12:, Nehemiah figured out this guy was a "false prophet". He did not specifically give any sort of biblical level prediction, but just said Nehemiah is in danger and that both of them need to hide in the temple. I don't know about you, but I'd be nervous if my name was in the bible with the label "false prophet". Doesn't do a lot for one's eternal destiny!
  - b) The important thing Nehemiah realized was that this was in a sense another trick to make him stop building the wall. After all, if the leader of the project was hiding in the temple, I'd bet the work would stop fast as people would be saying, "Hey, wait a minute, where is Nehemiah? Therefore, he saw it for what it was a "trap". The lesson for us of course has to do with being good learners of His Word. It helps us to make better decisions in life. That is what we see Nehemiah doing here.
  - c) You got to admit the "enemy" is running out of tricks at this point. Other than an actually attacking Jerusalem all of their efforts have failed.



- d) Remember why there was no physical attack: Because Nehemiah was put in charge by the emperor of the Persian Empire, which they all belonged to. If there was a physical war, it would spell disaster for the Samaritans and the "Jordanians" as it's Persian ordained. So it was a matter of trying to trick Nehemiah into stopping. All the efforts so far have failed.
17. Verse 14: Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.
- a) Nehemiah's style is to publicly point out the people who opposed God's plans. I'm sure he (Nehemiah) believes God knows all things and will judge people accordingly. I think this is just his way of keeping the names "fresh in his mind" in case they try something again.
- b) It's a way of saying, these people oppose the work God called us to do so, let's keep them in mind in case we have any future dealings with them!
- c) So does this mean we can call out people who've hurt us and "condemn them to hell". No, eternal judgment is only God's business not ours. Ours is to be a good witness for Jesus in all that we do. We can point out bad actions like Nehemiah is doing here. Proclaiming in a public way what they did is a form of punishment. We'll read in the next few verses these guys intermarried with the "nobles" in Israel. By calling them out it's a message to those in power proclaiming, "Careful who you're messing with!!" It's stating the "powerful men" in the area (Tobiah and Sanballat) are being called God's enemies
- d) As to the prophetess Noadiah, logical speculation is she was with Tobiah and Sanballat as she was their "spiritual counselor". Nehemiah called her out as a false prophet here. Why should I care about all of this? Glad you asked. The issue isn't so much these people. It's the fact that false prophets are always part of church history and should be called out as a false prophet, teacher, etc. whenever possible. I'm not talking about debatable issues that are in the bible. I'm talking about people who for example claim they're Christians, but do argue for example, "We're not saved by grace alone" or "We need to prove our worth if we want to be saved forever!" Yes we should do good works as a witness for Jesus but that is different from trying to prove our worth to God. Bottom line is Nehemiah called out this Noadiah person whoever she is. Again, I'd hate to be in someone's shoes who was labeled a false prophet in the bible! Could she have repented? Of course we don't the history after all of that, but I'm just saying part of the job of Christian leadership is to lead people close to God and away from false teaching. Nehemiah is doing that here.
- e) Finally remember this is a prayer. These people are leaders of other groups and have the power to influence others. Nehemiah is asking for God's help as he watched these people try to stop the work and he's asking for God's help so the project can be finished.
18. Verse 15: So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.
- a) Let's not overlook the good news of Verse 15. The project was done. This wasn't years of work, but less than two months. Did it cost people time and resources? Of course. Think of all the "we're broke" stuff in Chapter 15. Think of all the efforts Israel's enemies tried to stop this project.
- b) So if the project is done in Chapter 6, why is there a Chapter 7 to 13? Because Nehemiah's going to teach by example and illustration what was God's intent for Jerusalem. It's to be a place where people come to worship God. (Isaiah 56:7 as an example). The idea Jerusalem is now a "real city" that is protected from enemies. Now God wants His people to use that city to glorify Him. As I side note, I visited there a few years back. I figure if Jesus will be ruling the world from there I want to get a look at the place.
- c) So if God is going to protect His people, why is a wall necessary? One reason is to realize God never does for us what we can do for ourselves, even if it's hard work. Yes, I believe God is always watching out for us, but we still must take practical steps for protection.

- i) For example, why do we lock our doors at night if we trust God to protect us? Do we still get insurance against things if we're trusting God? My simple point is the practical things like a wall are necessary (or were in those days) for protection as a community.
  - d) Whether we care why or not, God said of all the places on planet earth, Jerusalem is going to be the place where God Himself will rule the world from one day. That's part of what's the second coming of Jesus is all about or "The Messiah" as religious Jewish people call it. I would argue if Jerusalem is God's chosen place, then it should be the duty of believers to at the least respect that choice and honor it. It's the idea of realizing, "God said Jerusalem is it, so what choice do we have, let's deal with it?" Why do you think "the world" (those who don't believe in God) are so obsessed with Jerusalem? There are no natural resources, yet it seems like the world is obsessed over the future of that city.
  - e) Speaking of God's enemies being obsessed over Jerusalem, notice Verse 16 states the men who opposed the building of the wall realized "It had something to do with God!" It was a witness for God simply that the wall was built. Again, what does Jesus call us to do, but to be a living witness for Him. This wall project was an example of such! The fact the wall got built out of "rubble" in less than two months despite all the outside threats and despite all the internal problems there, got done. That alone is a testimony to using one's lives for His glory.
  - f) As we know from history, "the enemies of God never sleep" so to speak. No we don't read of these "characters" any more in the book, but let's be honest the world's full of those who don't want Israel to succeed or even exist as a nation. There have been lots of attempts in history to wipe out the Jewish nation or at the least wipe out the line of the Messiah. Why is that? The short version is Satan gets to rule over this world until "x" number of people accept Jesus. No one but God the Father knows that number. Enough of that, time for us to take on the last three verses in this chapter:
19. Verse 17: Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. <sup>18</sup> For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.
- a) Bottom line these verses deal with the "last ditch" effort of the Israelites enemies to try to at the least stop the wall construction and discourage the Israelites from worshipping God at that time.
  - b) What these verses teach is that there was intermarriage between the Israelites and those in what is called Jordan today. That means there was mixed loyalties that existed at that time among the Israelites. Because of that mixed loyalty letters were sent to intimate Nehemiah from doing what he was called to do, lead the Israelites.
  - c) Back in Chapter 5, Verse 14 we learn that Nehemiah was the leader there for 12 years. I'm sure the threats and intimidation didn't stop when the wall was built. These people didn't want Israel to succeed as a nation? On a spiritual level, hopefully I've beaten that point to death by now so I don't have to repeat it. On a practical level, the enemies realize the area that surrounded Israel was a powerful ally of the Persian Empire with Nehemiah leading them as he was a "right hand man" of the emperor. What's the old saying, Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely? I see some of that here. The way Nehemiah did avoid the trapping of power was to constantly trust in God, constantly seek His guidance and realize He's in charge and we're not!
  - d) With that said, Nehemiah's mission was accomplished. Yes there's more to the story. We are only half way through the book so to speak. Yes all the things Nehemiah lead them to do had repercussions, which is why I called this lesson "The Ripple Affect". Still with the help of God, we can overcome internal and external problems in our lives!

20. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, You've given each of us an unknown but specific amount of time for us to use for Your glory. You've saved us for a purpose, to use our lives to make a difference for You in the world around us. Make it obvious to us how it is You desire we use our lives for You today and through the rest of our time here. We don't know what You have planned for us. All we know is You've saved us and given us the power of Your Spirit so we can use our lives so we can make a difference for You. Guide us and make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us at this moment. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen