Nehemiah
Chapter 6

Further Opposition to the Rebuilding

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— [2] Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages [a] on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me; [3] 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?" [4] Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. [5] Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter [6] in which was written: "It is reported among the nations—and Geshem [b] 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 [7] 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." [8] I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head." [9] 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." [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." [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!" [12] I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13] 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. [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.

6:1 *Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem.* See notes on 2:10, 19. (Inscriptions from Dedan in northwest Arabia and from Tell el-Maskhutah near Ismailia in Egypt bear the name of Geshem, who may have been in charge of a north Arabian confederacy that controlled vast areas from northeast Egypt to northern Arabia and southern Palestine. Geshem may have been opposed to Nehemiah's development of an

independent kingdom because he feared that it might interfere with his lucrative spice trade. (CSB)

6:2 Nehemiah both frustrated the attempts of enemies to sabotage the building project (ch 4) and resolved internal dissension (ch 5). Now opponents resorted to plots against his life. It was obvious to Nehemiah that the meeting was only a ruse to get him to leave the protecting walls of Jerusalem and its armed citizenry. (TLSB)

COME LET US MEET TOGETHER – Nehemiah, having successfully dealt with internal dissent that had threatened to disrupt the building of Jerusalem's wall (Chapter 5), reports that the project was on the brink of completion when his enemies made a series of last-minute attempts to stop him. The first of these came in the form of diplomatic correspondence designed to lure Nehemiah outside of Jerusalem and to the edge of the territory of Judea in order to assassinate him. (CC)

Ono. Located about seven miles southeast of Joppa near Lod (Lydda; see note on Ezr 2:33), in the westernmost area settled by the returning Jews (Ne 7:37; 11:35). It may have been proposed as neutral territory, but Nehemiah recognized the invitation as a trap (cf. Ge 4:8; Jer 41:1–3). (CSB)

C 30 mi NW of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

The meeting place was to be "in the Plain of Ono, the region around the city of Ono, which was located seven miles southeast of Joppa, on the border between Judea and Samaria. The Plain of Ono probably was also in the vicinity of a place called "the Valley of the Craftsmen" (11:35). Ono was located in the northwest part of the province of Judea and was in habited by Judeans (Ezra 2:33; Nehemiah 7:11:35; cf. 1 Chr. 8:12). The exact place where the proposed meeting was to occur is unknown. Nehemiah clearly recognized this as a veiled attempt on his life. Once he was lured to the fringes of Judea, it would have been much easier to murder him. (CC)

> Luther said that there three rules which are amply presented throughout Psalm 119. They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tenatio,* that is, prayer, meditation and spiritual trial. On the basis of his journey of faith and his own personal experience he found these three components of spirituality to be vital, necessary and effective in a faithful appropriation of the Christian heritage.
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> As is to be expected, he gives first place to the Bible, which is the source of true knowledge and wisdom and which turns wisdom of all other books into foolishness, because no one teaches about eternal life except this one alone. For that reason Luther advises that one kneel down in one's room and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, asking for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit so that one

> may rightly understand the message of Scripture. This way of beginning one's study of the Word is essential in as much as the Scriptures are not subject to one's own rational powers of understanding and insight. The Holy Spirit has to guide a person in the proper discernment of the truth and meaning of God's Word.
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> In the second place, meditation on Scripture, which follows prayer, involves diligent attention to the meaning of various words in their context and a prayerful reflection on the message conveyed. This meditative process is an undertaking which makes it possible for a person to strengthen his faith and to appropriate the riches of God's grace and truth revealed in his Word. Adhering faithfully to the external Word of Scripture is a precondition for the inner enlightenment of heart and mind by the Holy Spirit.
>
> Finally, spiritual trials are the ways and means by which the knowledge and understanding one has gained from meditating on Scripture are put to the test in the struggles of daily living. As a consequence one will experience "how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom." Such testing of one's faith in the encounter with various persons and events in the multitudinous settings of life is never an easy matter. Trust in God, and His Word will be subjected to all kinds of stresses and strains. The world will respond with opposition, misunderstanding and enmity. Doubts and misgivings will seek to demolish the citadel of faith. But one's eventual triumph over unbelief is assured, as one reverts to prayer and meditation on God's word and gives God the glory and praise for His grace. (Luther & Prayer, Martin E. Lehmann pp. 136-137)

Nehemiah was influenced by the Word of God and followed God-given principles rather than a policy of expediency. This required courage. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 96)

Discernment comes from our personal exposure to the Word of God. (Hebrews 5:13-14; see also Proverbs 2:1-9) (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p.102)

6:3 Nehemiah's sharp reply may seem like a haughty response to a reasonable invitation, but he correctly discerned the insincerity of his enemies. He refused to be distracted by matters that would divert his energies from rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. (CSB)

Though Nehemiah recognized the overture by Sanballat and Geshem to be part of an assassination plot, his reply was couched in diplomatic courtesy. Since he knew that his enemies were fully cognizant of the building project, he did not

deny its existence, but insisted that he had to see to its completion. Nehemiah was seeking to defuse the situation instead of escalate it into a confrontation. (CC)

6:4 *Four times.* Nehemiah's foes were persistent, but he was equally persistent in resisting them. (CSB)

That Sanballat and Geshem sent for invitations was evidence of their desperation. They knew that they had little time left, since the wall was complete, with no remaining breaches. The only major task that remained was to hang the doors in the gates. (CC)

6:5 *unsealed letter.* During this period a letter was ordinarily written on a papyrus or leather sheet, which was rolled up, tied with a string and sealed with a clay bulla (seal impression) to guarantee the letter's authenticity. Sanballat apparently wanted the contents of his letter to be made known to the public at large. (CSB)

Not sealed to keep it private. (TLSB)

Sanballat's desperation became even more evident when he sent a fifth message, this time in the hand of one of his officials. The letter was not sealed, but open, meaning that the official could have read it along the journey and could have told others of it contents. This shifted the conversation form private correspondence to public accusation. (CC)

6:6-7 The accusation that the Judeans were going to rebel and that Nehemiah sought to be their king – and that he had even commissioned prophets to proclaim him ruler – was a new twist on an old accusation (see Ezra 4:12-16). However, the letter itself was clearly designed as propaganda to incite Nehemiah, rather than to express any real concern about rebellion against the Persian king. (CC) Williamson has pointed out:

> Sanballat concludes by hinting that if Nehemiah does not respond to his invitation for a conference, letters will soon be on their way to the Achaemenid capital. …Sanballat seems to have overlooked the considerations (i) that secret meeting with Nehemiah in such circumstances might itself be construed as collaboration in rebellion, and (ii) that to seek a secret consultation after sending an open letter was somewhat self-contradictory. (CC)

6:6 Nehemiah's enemies charged him with secretly planning to lead a rebellion against Persia and set himself up as king of Judah. (TLSB)

nations. Such as Ammon, Philistia, and Moab. (TLSB)

their king. The Persian kings did not tolerate the claims of pretenders to kingship, as we can see from the Behistun (Bisitun) inscription of Darius I. In NT times the Roman emperor was likewise suspicious of any unauthorized claims to royalty (Jn 19:12; cf. Mt 2:1–13). (CSB)

Revolts were common in the Persian Empire, and most were led by trusted associates of the king. (PBC)

6:7 *prophets*. Nathan was among those prophets who proclaimed Solomon king (1Ki 1:34–40). Conspirators do not say which prophets they had in mind. (TLSB)

the king. Artaxerxes I. (TLSB)

take counsel together. Nehemiah does not record their plan. (TLSB)

6:8 *Nothing.* Nehemiah does not mince words. He calls the report a lie. He may have sent his own messenger to the Persian king to assure him of his loyalty. (CSB)

Nehemiah dismisses all allegations as fabrication. (TLSB)

Nehemiah's fifth reply to Sanballat abandoned any diplomatic niceties and called Sanballat's bluff. Nehemiah knew that Sanballat had not evidence for his accusation and he was confident in his relationship with King Artaxerxes. Therefore he flatly stated that fabricated lies would not intimate him. (CC)

6:9 *O God*. Nehemiah's prayer is obviously addressed to God, though His name is lacking in Hbr. (TLSB)

hands will get … weak. Figurative language to express the idea of discouragement. The Hebrew for this phrase is used also in Ezr 4:4; Jer 38:4, as well as on an ostracon from Lachish dated c. 588 B.C. (CSB)

He tells the readers that he knew what his enemies were thinking; by intimating him they thought they would be able to paralyze him with fear and stop the project. (CC)

STRENGTHEN MY HANDS – Nehemiah was well aware of the source of his strength, a source that could overcome any human fear. Thus he offers the shortest prayer in the book: "so now, strengthen my hands!" This prayer seeks God's help, knowing that he alone can crown our efforts with success and that His help overcomes all opposition from people and even demonic forces. (See, e.g., Ps. 46:1; 118:8:6; 121:1-8; cf. Ps. 56:3, 9; Rom. 8:31-39; Col. 2:8-15; Heb. 13:6) (CC)

His response was to ignore the lies of the enemy, continue his work and leave his defense to the Lord. This can be a lesson for us. We, too, may experience slander and attacks as we take unpopular positions because of loyalty to God's Word. (PBC)

6:10 *Shemaiah … was shut in.* Perhaps as a symbolic action to indicate that his own life was in danger and to suggest that both Nehemiah and he must flee to the temple (for other symbolic actions see 1Ki 22:11; Isa 20:2–4; Jer 27:2–7; 28:10–11; Eze 4:1–17; 12:3–11; Ac 21:11). Since Shemaiah had access to the temple, he may have been a priest. He was clearly a friend of Tobiah (cf. v. 12), and therefore Nehemiah's enemy. It was at least credible for Shemaiah to propose that Nehemiah take refuge in the temple area at the altar of asylum (see Ex 21:13–14 and notes), but not in the "house of God," the temple building itself. (CSB)

Known to Nehemiah, though his office is not stated. Common name in Levitical and prophetic circles (1Ch 9:14; Jer 26:20). Nehemiah's adversaries enlisted him in their plot. (TLSB)

There are, of course, times when a frank discussion of a problem is most important. There are other times, however, when the need of the hour is loyalty to our employers and adherence to our principles. Then there are those occasions when we must insist upon our priorities. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 104)

The next incident Nehemiah relates is his visit to the house of Shemaiah. This Shemaiah is probably mentioned only here, so we do not know any more about him. There is much conjecture over the reason for Shemaiah's confinement. Scholars have suggested that Shemaiah was claiming to be confined for his own safety, since he, like Nehemiah, also feared being attacked or that this was a symbolic part of his prophecy to indicate that Nehemiah should be similarly confined to the temple or that Shemaiah was ritually unclean. None of their suggestions can be proved, however. (CC)

Nehemiah apparently visited Shemaiah in him own house because of his confinement. Once there, Shemaiah offered both advice and what Nehemiah 6:12 calls a "prophecy." This purported prophecy was intended to panic Nehemiah into seeking protection in the temple building. Since Nehemiah was not a priest, he was not permitted to enter the temple itself, and so if he were to comply with this "prophecy," he would be putting a higher priority on his own human fear and on his safety than on the sanctity of God's temple. (CC)

The ruse proposed by Shemaiah implies that this man had access to the temple. He was "the son of Delaiah," and if Shemaiah was a descendant of the Delaiah mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:18 (which has the longer form of the Hebrew name), then he would have been a priest, and he could have legitimately entered

the temple. However, Delaiah was a fairly common name. (Also Jer. 36:12, 25; Ezra 2:60; Neh. 7:62; 1 Chr. 3:24; 24:18). (CC)

confined. Presumably for some religious reason (e.g., fulfillment of a vow, some ritual impurity). (TLSB)

6:11 *go into the temple and live?* Laypeople were forbidden to enter the temple under sentence of death (Nu 18:7). (TLSB)

Even if the threat against his life was real, Nehemiah was not a coward who would run into hiding. Nor would he transgress the law to save his life. As a layman, he was not permitted to enter the sanctuary (Nu 18:7). When King Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense, he was punished by being afflicted with leprosy (2Ch 26:16–21). (CSB)

Nehemiah, as layman, however, could enter only the temple courtyard and not the sanctuary itself (Num. 18:7; Heb. 9:6). While laymen could seek asylum in the temple courtyard before the altar, Nehemiah did not meet the conditions for such asylum. (Ex. 21:13-14; 1 Ki. 1:50-53; 2:28-34; cf. 2 Chr. 26:16-20; 27:2). (CC)

6:12 *prophecy*. Understood in broad sense of delivering a message; in this case, encouraging Nehemiah to enter the temple. (TLSB)

The fact that Shemaiah proposed a course of action contrary to God's word revealed him as a false prophet (cf. Dt 18:20; Isa 8:19–20). (CSB)

This faithful leader seems to have instantly recognized the false nature of Shemaiah's prophecy. Any prophecy that contradicts what God has already revealed is His Word and has commanded through his legitimate, inspired prophets is not from God (Deut. 18:20-22; Is. 8:19-20; Jer. 28:1-17). It also became clear to Nehemiah that Tobiah and Sanballat had accused Nehemiah of sponsoring his own false prophets (6:7), but it was actually Sanballat who was suborning fraudulent prophecy. (CC)

6:13 *sin*. Cf v 11. Nehemiah might have regarded running away to be a sin, showing lack of faith. (TLSB)

If Nehemiah had wavered in the face of the threat against him, his leadership would have been discredited and morale among the people would have plummeted. (CSB)

Nehemiah wisely understood the consequences of following Shemaiah's fabrication. He would have committed a grievous and cowardly public sin, and his reputation would have been ruined. Then it would have been difficult for the discredited governor to continue to be supported by the people. The Judeans

would know that he feared his human opponents more than God and he had let that fear overrule his faith and decide his course of action. Had Nehemiah fled to the temple in fear for his life, his speeches would have rung hollow from which he urged his fellow Judeans to be courageous in the face of the threats from Sanballat and Tobiah (e.g., Neh. 4:14, 20). (CC)

Despite the power of their office, public officials and also the leaders of God's people – then as now – rely at least in part on the good name, their acknowledged character of faithfulness, and their moral reputation, in order to govern effectively. When these are tarnished by public sins, the power of their office is diminished or even nullified, and they can be removed for cause. Even though an incumbent leader can demand obedience because of his office, it is much more effective to combine the power of the office with public respect for the one holding the office. This is especially true for pastors, who are shepherds of God's flock, serving under the oversight of the Good Shepherd, who will retune and evaluate their service. (See, e.g., Jn. 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). (CC)

6:14 *Remember.* See note on 1:8. (CSB)

Nehemiah ends his account of the final attempts to prevent the building of Jerusalem's wall with another short prayer. This prayer like the one in Neh. 4:4-5, relies on God to take action. Nehemiah simply asks God to remember the action of those who opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. The sins of Tobiah and Sanballat were against both the Second Table of the Law (seeking to harm their neighbor Nehemiah) and the First Table of the Law (employing false prophets, thereby taking God's name in vain, and fashioning a false god). (CC)

prophetess. See note on Ex 15:20. (CSB)

Along with other unnamed prophets, this unknown woman was part of the plot to eliminate Nehemiah in one way or another. (TLSB)

While earlier OT books mention false prophets, this is the first time we are told in either Ezra or Nehemiah that there were false prophets in the postexilic era. They included a prophetess named Noadiah. We know nothing about Noadiah, other than that she was a woman prophet, or prophetess. Only four other women in the OT are called "prophetess": Miriam (Ex. 15:20); Deborah (Judges 4:4); Huldah (22 Kings 22:14 / 2 Chr. 34:2); and Isaiah's wife (Is. 8:3). Two of these women may have received this title simply because of their relationship to a true prophet: Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron, and Isaiah's wife was married to the prophet. The OT does not refer to any prophecy or prophetic leadership of these two women. Deborah did serve as a leader in Israel, but as a reluctant military leader, after a man, Barak, was too timid to follow her counsel for him to assume sole leadership (Judges 4:1-9). Only Huldah was inspired to

utter true prophecy, and she lived in the grim final days of Judah, shortly before it fell to Babylon. (CC)

Noadiah stands in sharp contrast to the four godly women called "prophetess," since she is the only one named among the enemies of God and His people. She apparently was in league with other false prophets, including Shemaiah, who tried to intimate Nehemiah and sabotage the rebuilding of Jerusalem. We can therefore infer that her prophecy opposed God's will. (CC)

6:1–14 False prophets attempt to deceive Nehemiah and bring about his death. God's people must always test claims of prophetic authority against the sure Word of prophecy: Holy Scripture (Dt 18:20–22; 1Jn 4:1–3). Abide in God's Word, which is able to make you wise for life and for eternal life through Christ. • Now, O God, strengthen my hands according to Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

The Completion of the Wall

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 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. 17 Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. 18 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. 19 Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

6:15 *twenty-fifth of Elul.* Oct. 2, 445 B.C. (CSB)

Aug/Sept. (TLSB)

fifty-two days. The walls that lay in ruins for nearly a century and a half were rebuilt in less than two months once the people were galvanized into action by Nehemiah's leadership. Archaeological investigations have shown that the circumference of the wall in Nehemiah's day was much reduced. Josephus states (*Antiquities,* 11.5.8) that the rebuilding of the wall took two years and four months, but he is doubtless including such additional tasks as further strengthening of various sections, embellishing and beautifying, and the like. The dedication of the wall is described in 12:27–47. (CSB)

Speedy completion of the project is a tribute both to Nehemiah's resourceful management and to the people's devotion. Yet, in the final analysis, success was possible only with God's help (v 16). (TLSB)

The completion of the wall in fifty-two days seems very quick. However, it should be borne in mind that some restoration work had been done previously (Ezra 4:12). In addition, in many places the pre-exilic wall was probably still extant and all that it needed was for smaller breaches to be filled, the top finished, and any deterioration from 140 years of neglect to be repaired. (CC)

6:16 *nations … fell greatly*. Awe of God forced them to acknowledge His hand in the Judeans' accomplishments. (TLSB)

DONE WITH THE HELP OF THE LORD – Sanballat had assembled a coalition that surrounded Judea on all sides. The reaction of these surrounding peoples to the wall's completion received a twofold description by Nehemiah. First, Nehemiah says they were (became afraid and were dispirited." Their fear was probably that they would now lose a measure of their superiority over Judea in imperial matters, and this was coupled with discouragement that they would no longer be able to dominate the Judeans as they had in the past. (CC)

Second, Nehemiah states that "they knew that this work had been accomplished by our God." This knowledge of course was not the same as believing in God and abandoning their pagan beliefs (cf. Mk. 1:34; Lk. 20:21; James 2:19). Instead they had to acknowledge to themselves that they were not simply opposing the Judeans, but that they had also been opposing the God of Israel, who could and did empower His people to accomplish His work despite great opposition. This was part of their fear and discouragement, since they now understood that they were unable to oppose God's will successfully (cf. Acts 5:38-39). (CC)

From the circumstance that Nehemiah faced we learn that even when we have successfully countered all the opposition, watchfulness and prayer must continue to characterize our lives. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – p. 109)

He had an unshakable *conviction* that what he was doing was what God wanted done. His confidence in the Lord released him from the pressure of being "a success," preserved his objectivity, overcame the fears that others endeavored to instill in him, and insured that he was free from undue concern. This *confidence* is contagious. Without it there can be no effective leadership. These important qualities are, however, insufficient without courage. *Courage* serves as a powerful antidote to discouragement. Nehemiah's courage came from his relationship with the Lord and was such that he did not fear what others might think of him or do to him. (Nehemiah and the Dynamics of Effective Leadership – pp.110-111)

6:17–19 Tobiah was related to an influential family in Judah, since his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, who had helped repair the wall of Jerusalem (3:4, 30). (CSB)

Despite the completion of the wall and the discouragement of the surrounding peoples, Tobiah remained subversively active in Judean affairs, posing a continual threat to Nehemiah's leadership. Some of the leaders of Judah had close ties to Tobiah, either by oath – which involved both economic and political commitments – and by marriage. This resulted in an ongoing exchange of letters whereby Tobiah was able to gather inside information about Nehemiah's activities and convey instructions to his allies within Judah. These allies also attempted to convince Nehemiah that Tobiah and his intentions (as exhibited by his "good deeds," (6:19) were honorable. But Nehemiah would have none of it, since he had received intimidating letters from Tobiah's ally Sanballat, and he knew that Tobiah was allied with Sanballat, Geshem the Arab, and others who also were "our enemies" (6:1-9). (CC)

Apparently Tobiah must have at least claimed allegiance to Yahweh, the God of Israel. This seems evident form his name, meaning "Yahweh is good," and the name he bestowed on his son Jehohanan, meaning "Yahweh is gracious." To some of the Judeans these theophoric names may have made Tobiah seem less of a direct opponent than Sanballat, whose name was Babylonian, or Gashmu/Geshem, whose name was Arabic. (CC)

Tobiah's family had married into the families of two Judean nobles. (This is connected to Ezra 9-10) Shecaniah, Tobiah's father-in-law, was a descendant of Arah (Ezra 2:5/Nehemiah 7:10). (CC)

Tobiah's son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Two men who had worked on sections of the wall of Jerusalem bore this name (3:4, 30). The man mentioned here is probably the Meshullam who repaired part of theeastern wall and had a chamber in the temple – and was therefore one of the priests (3:30). In Nehemiah 13:4 we are told that Tobiah was related (by marriage) to a priest named Eliashib, who was perhaps a relative of Meshullam. That Meshullam could support Nehemiah and ally himself with Tobiah (despite Tobiah's mocking words about the builders of the wall in Nehemiah 4:3 demonstrates that some in Judah were ambivalent about Nehemiah's program. This ambivalence even led to defiling the temple by allowing a foreign presence in the temple itself (13:4-9). (CC)

Such ambivalence among God's people can come from attachments to things of this world that at times cloud their judgment and may lead them to compromise the truth of the Gospel. (CC) Paul warned the Corinthians of this:

> "[14] Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? [15] What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? [16] What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the

> living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." [17]"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." [18]"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

Christians today, like the Judeans in Nehemiah's day, need to be aware that connections with things in this world, even when they are not inherently sinful in and of themselves, may lead God's people to actions that threaten the very Gospel. In such situations Christians are to sever any such attachments, lest they pervert the Gospel. (CC) The Formula of Concord addresses just such situations:

> When a clear-cut confession of faith is demanded of us, we dare not yield to the enemies in such indifferent things, as the apostle Paul write, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). "Do not be mis-mated with unbelievers, for what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14). "To them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you" (Gal. 2:5). In such a case it is no longer a question of indifferent things, but a matter which has to do with the truth of the Gospel, Christian liberty, and the sanctioning of public idolatry, as well as preventing offense to the weak in faith. In all these things we have no concessions to make, but we should witness an unequivocal confession and suffer in consequence what God sends us and what he lets the enemies inflict on us. (FC Ep. X 6) (CC)

Nehemiah was undeterred by the insidious attempts at intimidation, and he remained just such a steadfast confessor of the Gospel. Jesus Christ Himself, in His testimony before Pontius Pilate, made "the good confession," and the apostle Paul especially calls upon pastors like Timothy to maintain their "good confession" (1 Tim. 6:12-13). Indeed God calls Christians boldly to profess and to hold fast to the confession of Christ (2 Cor. 9:13; Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23). This is done, for example, when the assembled congregation makes the ecumenical confession of faith by means of the Apostles', Nicene, or Athanasian Creed. (CC)

Even as the walls were being completed, opposition from outside and inside Jerusalem continued. This section is especially important to the overall theme of Ezra and Nehemiah, because it demonstrates that the intermarriages with heathen neighbors were actually undermining the strength pf the nation. When Ezra and Nehemiah denounced such intermarriage, they were not just arguing about unimportant religious distinction or personal prejudices. They were dealing with a real threat to Israel. Leading citizens in Judah were so compromised by their commercial and marriage ties with heathen neighbors that they were unable to see any reason why Tobiah should not be accepted as one of them. He had even been provided a room in the temple! (eh. 13:4-9) The completion of the walls did not stop the evil effects of these intermarriages. (PBC)

6:18 *son-in-law of Shecaniah*. Tobiah, ally of Samaritan governor Sanballat, had married into a prominent Jerusalem family. Shecaniah was the son of Arah, head of a clan (7:10). There were family ties also with Berechiah, supervisor of a contingent of workers on the wall (3:4, 30). These relatives were Tobiah's channels for a campaign of propaganda and intimidation. (TLSB)

6:19 *his good deeds*. Tobiah's relatives spoke well of him to undermine morale and Nehemiah's good name. (TLSB)