



# Facing Intimidation

Nehemiah 6

- In Nehemiah 4, we considered “opposition from the outside.” However, the attempts to stop the wall rebuilding were not successful. So they decided to target Nehemiah in particular. They tried to “intimidate” him, or make him afraid (6:9, 14, 19).<sup>1</sup>

## Intimidation by Sanballat

- Read Nehemiah 6:1-9. When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem<sup>2</sup> and the rest of the Jews’ enemies heard that the wall rebuilding was almost finished, they were not happy. So Sanballat and Geshem sent Nehemiah a message: “Come, let us meet together [outside Jerusalem]” (6:2).
- Nehemiah declined because “they were scheming to harm [him]” (6:3). But Sanballat and Geshem were persistent. Four times they sent Nehemiah the same message, and each time Nehemiah gave them the same answer (6:4). So Sanballat sent him an open letter (6:5).
  1. How would you describe Sanballat’s strategy (plan) and purpose in sending this letter? (6:6-7, 9)<sup>3</sup>

2. How did Nehemiah respond? (6:8-9)



## Intimidation through Insiders

- Read Nehemiah 6:10-14.<sup>4</sup> Shemaiah told Nehemiah that men were coming to kill him during the night. So he said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors” (6:10). However, Nehemiah refused his proposal.
  3. Why did Nehemiah refuse Shemaiah’s proposal? (6:11-14)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘intimidate’ (*yārē*) – make to fear, make afraid, frighten. Nehemiah 6 may be divided into three sections (6:1-9; 6:10-14; 6:15-19). Each section ends with a statement concerning the attempt to intimidate (frighten) Nehemiah.

<sup>2</sup> Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem are first mentioned in Nehemiah 2:19 (see Lesson 2). Sanballat and Tobiah are typically mentioned together (2:10, 19; 4:1-3, 7).

<sup>3</sup> Sanballat’s accusations were similar to those used earlier by Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra 4:7-16) which succeeded in stopping work on the walls (4:17-22). God’s enemies often lie or distort the truth to make God’s people and purposes sound threatening, bad and harmful. By creating unfounded fear, they can achieve their goals. Such was the enemies’ strategy against Jesus Christ, who was accused of rebelling against both Roman authority and God.

<sup>4</sup> Shemaiah, not mentioned elsewhere, is unknown to us. He acted as a prophet (6:12) and may have been a priest since he apparently had access into the temple (6:10). We are not sure why Nehemiah went to his house, but he likely went in response to Shemaiah’s invitation.

<sup>5</sup> As governor and leader, Nehemiah would not run and hide (6:11). Also, to ‘go into the temple’ was not lawful for a person who was not a priest. If Nehemiah did what Shemaiah proposed, he would ‘commit a sin’ and get a ‘bad name’ (6:13). Nehemiah realized that God had not sent Shemaiah, but rather Sanballat and Tobiah had sent him to intimidate, tempt, and discredit Nehemiah. As Christians, we face similar opposition.

- ❑ Again, Nehemiah prayed (6:14).<sup>6</sup>

## Intimidation Reversed

- ❑ Read Nehemiah 6:15-16. Despite constant opposition, the wall around Jerusalem was completed in only 52 days.<sup>7</sup> When their enemies heard this, “all the surrounding nations (provinces) were afraid and lost their self-confidence”<sup>8</sup> (6:16a).
  4. Why were they made afraid? Why did they lose their self-confidence? (6:15-16)

## Intimidation in Those Days

- ❑ “Also, in those days...” Nehemiah was opposed in other ways. Read Nehemiah 6:17-19.
- ❑ Tobiah had connections with the Jews. Both he and his son had married into Jewish families (6:18) and many Jews were obligated to him.<sup>9</sup> Thus there was a complex mix of opposition from both outside and inside the Jewish community.
- ❑ Nehemiah faced intimidation in various ways. He faced intimidation...
  - ...from (or through) different people – e.g., Sanballat (6:2, 5); Geshem (6:2); Shemaiah (6:10); Tobiah (6:12); Noadiah and other “prophets” (6:14).
  - ...by different means and methods – e.g., repeated attempts to draw Nehemiah into danger (6:2-4); an open letter with false accusations and threats, attempting to frighten and discourage Nehemiah and his followers (6:5-7, 9); a supposedly godly man’s attempt to frighten Nehemiah into a sinful act and the discrediting of his name (6:10).

## Intimidation Today

- ❑ Reflecting on Nehemiah’s situations and example, consider the following questions.
  5. As we seek to do God’s work, in what ways might *we* be intimidated or made afraid?<sup>10</sup>
  6. How can we overcome intimidation? (6:3-4, 8-9, 11-12, 16)

## Reflection/Application

- If you have trusted in Jesus as Savior, you don’t need to be afraid of the people and things that oppose you, because your security and victory is in Him. Do you need to trust in Jesus?
- Brothers and sisters, God want us to overcome intimidation as we trust in Him. Read Psalm 56:3-4, Romans 8:31-39; Philippians 1:27-29 and 1 Peter 3:8-18; and be encouraged.

<sup>6</sup> Nehemiah asked God to ‘remember’ Tobiah, Sanballat and others ‘because of what they have done’ (6:14).

Vengeance was left to God (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19). Nehemiah mentions ‘Noadiah... and the rest of the prophets’ which indicates that Shemaiah wasn’t the only prophet who tried to intimidate Nehemiah.

<sup>7</sup> ‘twenty-fifth of Elul’ – likely mid-September, though some have calculated October 2, 445 BC.

<sup>8</sup> The HCSB says, ‘all the surrounding nations were intimidated...’ But this time God was doing the intimidation.

<sup>9</sup> Tobiah’s relative Meshullam (son of Berekiah) was involved in rebuilding the wall (3:4, 30), but that doesn’t necessarily mean he was totally supportive of Nehemiah’s policies.

<sup>10</sup> While people or organizations may intimidate us, our opposition is ultimately spiritual (Ephesians 6:10-12). And like Nehemiah, we may face a complex mix of opposition from both the outside and inside. We may feel intimidated by someone even when they are not trying to intimidate us. We may feel intimidated by particular circumstances or conditions because of our own inadequacies, insecurities or fears.