

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH 6

Sanballat and his brethren, hearing the wall was finished, sent to Nehemiah, to have a meeting with him at a place named, which he refused, (^{<1616>}Nehemiah 6:1,2), then they sent him a terrifying letter, suggesting that he, and the Jews with him, would be treated as rebels, since their intention, as reported, was to make him king, which letter he regarded not, (^{<1618>}Nehemiah 6:3-9), then they employed some that pretended to be prophets to advise him to flee to the temple for safety, which he rejected, (^{<1619>}Nehemiah 6:10-14) and so the work went on and was finished, though there was a secret correspondence carried on between their enemies and some false brethren among themselves, (^{<1620>}Nehemiah 6:15-19).

Ver. 1. *Now it came to pass, when Sanballat and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, etc.]* Quite finished it:

and that there was no breach left therein; but all was made up firm and strong:

though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates; not upon all of them, though some might by the particular builders of them; and they all of them might be ready made, though not as yet put upon the hinges.

Ver. 2. *Then Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, etc.]* Messengers:

saying, come, let us meet together in some one of the villages; in Cephirim, which Jarchi takes to be the name of a place, perhaps the same with Cephirah, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, (^{<1621>}Joshua 18:26)

in the plain of Ono; which was in the same tribe, (see ^{<1622>}1 Chronicles 8:12), they might pretend a friendly meeting, to accommodate differences between them, or to converse together about the general interest of the king of Persia in those parts:

but they thought to do me mischief; to kill him, or at least to confine him; this he either conjectured from their general character and behaviour, or he had intelligence of their design.

Ver. 3. *And I sent messengers unto them*, etc.] He did not show any open contempt of them, nor did he even return answer by the messenger that came from them, but sent some of his own people to them:

saying, I am doing a great work; was about an affair of great importance, very busy, and not at leisure to give them a meeting:

so that I cannot come down; Jerusalem being built on an eminence, and the place proposed to meet at in a plain, going thither is expressed by coming down:

why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you? signifying that it would cease if he left it; and it being of greater consequence than anything they could have to converse about, he argues it would be wrong to relinquish it on such an account; this was the reason he thought fit to give, but was not the only, nor the principal reason, which is suggested in the preceding verse.

Ver. 4. *Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort*, etc.] Being very desirous of getting him into their hands, and therefore were very pressing and importunate:

and I answered them after the same manner; every time as before, he being as much bent on finishing the work as they were to divert him from it.

Ver. 5. *Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time*, etc.] In his own name, neither Tobiah nor Geshem joining with him, he being more solicitous and anxious to get him into his hands than any of them; and it may be, as some think, pretending more friendship for him than the rest, and therefore writes alone, as if they knew nothing of his writing:

with an open letter in his hand: which having in it an intimation of Nehemiah being guilty of treason, anyone that would might read it, and so spread the defamation.

Ver. 6. *Wherein was written, it is reported among, the Heathen*, etc.] Among the several neighbouring nations; it was an affair that was not

whispered about among a few only; it was common talk, it was in every body's mouth in divers nations:

and Gashmu saith it; the same with Geshem the Arabian; he affirms it, and will abide by his assertion, and engages to make good what he says; he mentions him by name, who he knew would not be offended with him for making use of it, and who doubtless agreed that he should; that Nehemiah might not think this was the talk of some of the lower rank of the people, but even was averred by no less than the king's governor in Arabia:

that thou and the Jews think to rebel; that they had formed a scheme, and were taking measures to raise a rebellion against the king of Persia, and revolt from him:

for which cause thou buildest the wall; the wall of Jerusalem, for their security against any force that might be sent to quell them:

that thou mayest be their king, according to these words; written in this epistle, and reported among the Heathens.

Ver. 7. *And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem*, etc.] This he said to cover what he and Tobiah had been doing, tampering with, corrupting, and hiring the prophets to discourage him, and put him upon methods, whereby the work would cease:

saying, there is a king in Judah; besides Artaxerxes, whose yoke they were casting off, having got a king of their own, and among them:

and now shall it be reported to the king, according to these words; such a report as this, and in those very words, will soon reach the ears of the king of Persia:

come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together; contrive the best method to put a stop to this report, if a false one, and to wipe off the reproach that is upon thee, and may affect us; and thus partly terrifying him, and partly pretending friendship to him, hoped to get him into his hands.

Ver. 8. *Then I sent unto him*, etc.] Whether a letter, or a messenger, is not said:

saying there are no such things done as thou sayest; that there was any scheme formed to rebel, and make him king, or that prophets were appointed to declare him such:

but thou feignest them out of thine own heart; in short, that they were no other than lies of his own inventing.

Ver. 9. *For they all made us afraid*, etc.] Or you all, as Aben Ezra interprets it; or all the Heathen nations, as Jarchi; this was the design of all those scandalous reports, to intimidate them, and with this they pleased themselves, as follows:

their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done; this they hoped would be the effect of those reports sent to them:

now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands; and let them not have what they will, and hope for; according to Aben Ezra, these words are directed to Sanballat, that if he was a friend, as he pretended, that instead of weakening, he would strengthen his hands by a sincere reconciliation; so Vatablus; but they are an address to God, such short ejaculations being usual with Nehemiah.

Ver. 10. *Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up*, etc.] Either in his own house, or in a chamber in the temple, as if he had given himself up to meditation, fasting, and prayer; or, as he might suggest to Nehemiah, for his safety, and so designed it as an example to him; this man might be a priest of the course of Delaiah, (^{<132418>}1 Chronicles 24:18) or however he was a person Nehemiah had a good opinion of, and came to him on the letters sent to him by his enemies, to consult with him, and the rest, since they had suggested that he had appointed prophets to speak of him as a king:

and he said let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; this looks as if he was in his own house, or if in a chamber of the temple, that he thought that was not secret and safe enough, and therefore proposed going within the temple, into the holy place, where none but priests might go:

for they will come to slay thee; meaning his enemies, Sanballat and his companions:

yea, in the night they will come to slay thee; that very night, and therefore no time should be lost in providing for his safety.

Ver. 11. *And I said, should such a man as I flee?* etc.] The king's commissioner, who had the conducting and management of the whole affair of building the wall of Jerusalem, on whom it wholly depended; for, should he absent himself, the people would depart and leave their work, and the city and wall be left defenceless, which was what was hoped for from this scheme; and who had expressed such confidence in God, and had had such success:

and who is there, that, being as I am; in such a post, and in such circumstances, and on whom so much depended:

would go into the temple to save his life? or where there was little reason to believe it would be preserved long, should he take such a step as that:

I will not go in; as being neither lawful, nor honourable, nor safe.

Ver. 12. *And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him*, etc.] Because he advised to that which was against the cause of God and true religion:

but that he pronounced the prophecy against me; for by fleeing, as he advised, it would seem that he was guilty of the crimes of rebellion and treason he was charged with; and leaving the people, as they would in course break up, he himself could not be long in safety, no, not in the temple:

for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him; this he found out afterwards, on purpose to intimidate him, and take such measures as that thereby he would lose his character and his influence.

Ver. 13. *Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin*, etc.] By distrusting the power and providence of God to protect him, and by going into such a part of the temple, which he, being no priest, had no right to go into:

and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me; as a rebel and traitor against the king, which had been reported of him, and which would be strengthened by such a step.

Ver. 14. *My God, think thou on Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works*, etc.] Their wicked counsels and schemes, and not only confound and disappoint them, but reward them as they deserve:

and on the prophetess Noadiah: whom Aben Ezra takes to be the same with Shemaiah, because he said, *dwn*, “let us meet”, etc. (^{<1660>}Nehemiah 6:10), but no doubt it is the name of a woman, a false prophetess, and was hired, and in the same scheme with Shemaiah:

and the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear; and so put him on leaving the people, and the work he was engaged in, and flee for his safety; it seems there were more than are by name mentioned, who sought to discourage and intimidate him.

Ver. 15. *So the wall was finished in the twenty fifth day of the month Elul*, etc.] The sixth month, answering to part of August and part of September:

in fifty and two days; which Aben Ezra reckons from the time that Sanballat sent his letter to Nehemiah, when no more were wanting than to set the doors upon the gates, (^{<1661>}Nehemiah 6:1), but rather these, with Jarchi, must be reckoned from the time the building was begun; which, reckoning back from the twenty fifth of Elul, it will appear it was begun the third day of the fifth month Ab; nor need this be thought incredible, considering the number of workmen, their ardour and diligence in building, and that the walls were not wholly built all around, only repaired, and breaches made up, and much of the old materials were made use of, which were at hand, and stone unhewed, and especially being attended with the blessing of God, which succeeded the undertaking: nor are there wanting examples similar to this; and as it is observed by many from Curtius ^{f36}, the walls of new Alexandria, which were sixty furlongs in length, or more than seven miles, were finished in seventeen days; if Nicephorus ^{f37} is to be credited, the high walls which surrounded Constantinople, and were twenty miles in circumference, were finished in two months time. Josephus is not to be regarded, who, contrary to the Scriptures says ^{f38}, this wall of Jerusalem was two years and four months in building.

Ver. 16. *And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof*, etc.] That the wall was finished:

and all the Heathen that were about us saw these things; the neighbouring nations, who not only heard with their ears, but saw with their eyes what was done:

they were much cast down in their own eyes; through shame and confusion, because of their own scoffs and jeers; through grief and vexation at the unexpected success of the Jews, and through the fear of them that was fallen upon them, as Jarchi notes:

for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God; his special providence and blessing attending it, as appeared by its being so soon effected.

Ver. 17. *Moreover, in those days*, etc.] While the wall was building:

the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them; letters passed between them frequently, they informing him how things went on at Jerusalem, and he advising them to what was detrimental to the true interest of their nation; such false friends had Nehemiah about him, and yet the work succeeded under him; which showed it the more to be of God.

Ver. 18. *For there were many in Judah sworn unto him*, etc.] To Tobiah, who not only in a private manner corresponded with him by letters, but bound themselves by an oath to him to be true to his interest, and do as he should advise them:

because he was the son in law of Shechaniah, the son of Arah; of a family that came up with Zerubbabel from the captivity, (^{<19115>}Ezra 2:5) and very probably of considerable note:

and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah; a very eminent person, concerned in building the wall, (^{<19114>}Nehemiah 3:4,30).

Ver. 19. *Also they reported his good deeds before me*, etc.] Recommended him as a very worthy man, deserving of respect and notice by Nehemiah, and to be taken into his friendship, and admitted to conversation with him, whose counsel and advice might be of service:

and uttered my words to him; reported both what he said and did; for the word used signifies both words and actions:

and Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear; perceiving, by the intelligence of his friends, that Nehemiah would have nothing to say to him, nor to do with him, he threatened him.