

# Through Hidden Opposition: Strength

Nehemiah 6:1–9



Week Eight

## inTro



Read This Week's Passage:  
Nehemiah 6:1–9

### OVER THE MOUNTAIN

In chapter 4 Nehemiah encountered external opposition to his leadership over repairing the walls of Jerusalem. He then saw another obstacle when his own people halted the work due to social injustice in chapter 5. Like a bad rash, Sanballat, Tobiah, and their coconspirators are back in chapter 6, presenting additional complications! This time around, they do not attack Nehemiah directly but scheme a plot to get rid of him altogether.

If you see parallels, fear not; you are not seeing double. The pattern of the book of Nehemiah is a Hebrew chiasm (like an arch, or mountain). Chapter 4 is linked with chapter 6 about opposition. Later on, we will see chapter 3 linking with chapter 7 on organization; chapter 2 with chapter 8 on revival; and chapter 1 with chapter 9 on prayer. A chiasm leads up to the apex of the mountain, which tends to be the climax, or the most important focus of the narrative. In this case, the apex was chapter 5, which we studied last week. Ultimately, who does chapter 6 allude to? This week, we go down the mountain and retrace the themes that we saw on the way up.



## **inScribe**

Write out Nehemiah 6:1–9 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out Nehemiah 6:1–5. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, outline it, or mind map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

**Circle** repeated words/phrases/ideas

**Underline** words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

What should the Christian's response to personal attack be? To what extent are you responsible for how you are viewed by those around you?



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**OH NO!**

The coalition's efforts to hinder the work of Nehemiah were unsuccessful. He had proved victorious against external forces as well as the complications of internal conflicts. This time, the coalition used deceptive techniques and compromise to halt the almost completed reconstruction program.

This time, the enemies threatened the very life of Nehemiah. Instead of open attack, they suggested an "ecumenical" conference in the plain of Ono. As they say, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." The plain of Ono was a full day's journey from the west of Jerusalem, between the lands of the Ashdodites and Samaritans. But Nehemiah discerned that this course of action was dangerous for several reasons:

1. The work itself would have been delayed for at least three days: one to travel there, one to travel back, and at least one for dialogue.
2. The conference was an invitation to compromise, make deals, negotiate, and ultimately shift from strict obedience to God's will.
3. Nehemiah could have been easily ambushed and assassinated along this journey.

Nehemiah replied curtly without mentioning any suspicions or hostile feelings, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:3, NKJV). His answer was firm, rational, and mission-oriented. Though the enemies persisted four more times with letters, Nehemiah's resolve did not waver.

Some leaders are afraid of appearing too stubborn or obstinate. Others, for public relations or public opinion, are more willing to sway from one opinion to another. This scenario transcends the need to be pragmatic and utilitarian. It was a covert threat to the project that God had called him to do. They were on the verge of finishing, and Nehemiah knew all this was an invitation to compromise his integrity as well as his life. When the enemies of God invite you to Ono, your response should be, "Oh no!"

## CARBON COPY

The second tactic of the enemies was the sending of the fifth letter. This time instead of an invitation to a dialogue, it was an open letter. It was common for letters to be rolled up on both ends and tied with string. A clay seal was fixed to the knot so that it could not be read. An open letter indicated that there was no seal, inviting all those who transported it to read it and spread the news. In other words, this was old-fashioned propaganda, innuendo, and gossip, intended to cause Nehemiah alarm and make him fear for his reputation.

We may not write letters with seals in the same way today, but our communication is still similar. The modern equivalent of open letters would be the cc line found in emails. Ironically, cc stands for carbon copy, a relic of a time when instant duplicates of documents were made using carbon paper.

Sanballat writes Nehemiah an email, cc'ing virtually everyone in the area, perhaps even the king of Media-Persia. The letter rumored, with Geshem the Arabian's testimony, that Nehemiah was to rebel against King Artaxerxes and make himself king of Jerusalem. It was a passive-aggressive suggestion of treason while making Sanballat look good. On these grounds, the letter instructed Nehemiah to have a meeting to "consult together."

How should Christian leadership handle attacks on personal reputation and rumors? What should leaders do when malicious rumors are circulated about them? Nehemiah did not worry about his own reputation nor about the king's potential response to the rumors. He could have sent response emails, explaining himself and the situation. But the more you defend yourself in these situations, the guiltier you look. Nehemiah's response is incisive: "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart" (Nehemiah 6:8, NKJV). Mic drop.

These were matters beyond his personal control or that of a political strategist or public relations department. Like he has done from the beginning of the book and in all emergencies, Nehemiah prays another spontaneous prayer, asking for strength. The narrative on the rumors ends there, and there seems to be no negative repercussions as a result.



**inTerpret**

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?



Read more at  
[www.inverseible.org/neh8-4](http://www.inverseible.org/neh8-4)

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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Prov. 16:28; 17:9; 18:8

James 4:11

2 John 1:7-11



What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with Nehemiah 6:1-9?

Review your memorized verse from Nehemiah 6:1-9.

## ALL THESE THINGS

We all have our modern-day Sanballats and Tobiahs attempting to lure us into the compromise-ridden plains of Ono. But not all compromise is bad. We must be willing, in relationships, to compromise in matters of sheer personal preference. But there is a type of compromise that seeks to peck away at our core, that sacrifices integrity for some temporal gain.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV). Like Nehemiah, what must always be kept before us is the kingdom of God and His righteousness; in other words, the people that will comprise the kingdom of God (for He has no need of land) and the character of Jesus Christ!

When looking for a job, we look at the salary amount, benefits, and career potential. When looking for a potential spouse, we consider their looks, family background, income, and education. When looking for a house, we look at resale value, location, and aesthetics. But Jesus says, “All these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows you need all these things.”

Followers of Christ are to look at the potential for evangelism and the character of Jesus first. You’re not just looking for a job; you’re looking for an expenses-paid missionary opportunity. Your spouse is not just a companion but is a spiritual partner to reflect God’s character together. It’s not just a house; it’s a mission base and training center for ministry to your community.

Today we have Ono offers to compromise: to work on the seventh-day Sabbath; to find someone nice to marry, but not a godly and faithful Seventh-day Adventist; and to accrue unreasonable debt to buy an irrationally large house to impress people we don’t even like. These calls don’t come only once; like the five letters of Nehemiah 6, they may persist throughout our lives. Temptations at work evolve into temptations within our careers; temptations of dating develop into temptations in our marriages; temptations of houses progress into temptations of lifestyle.

Modern Onos abound, and our response should be, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.” We can’t fight against these pressures on our own, but when we pray, “O God, strengthen my hands” (Nehemiah 6:9, NKJV), Jesus will keep us from falling (Jude 1:24).



**inVite**

Meditate on Nehemiah 6:1–9 again and look for Jesus in the passage.



What parallels do you see between Jesus’ response to temptation and Nehemiah’s response?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer: How do you respond to seeing Jesus in this way?



Read more at  
[www.inverseible.org/neh8-6](http://www.inverseible.org/neh8-6)

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Review your memory verse.  
How does it apply to your  
life this week?

—————→  
As you have studied this  
week, what personal  
applications have you been  
convicted of in your life?

What are practical applications  
you must make in your school,  
family, workplace, and church?



Read more inSight from the  
Spirit of Prophecy at  
[www.inverseible.org/neh8-7](http://www.inverseible.org/neh8-7)

**AGAINST THE GRAIN**

“The reason many in this age of the world make no greater advancement in the divine life is because they interpret the will of God to be just what they will to do. While following their own desires, they flatter themselves that they are conforming to God’s will. These have no conflicts with self. There are others who for a time are successful in the struggle against their selfish desire for pleasure and ease. They are sincere and earnest, but grow weary of protracted effort, of daily death, of ceaseless turmoil. Indolence seems inviting, death to self repulsive; and they close their drowsy eyes and fall under the power of temptation instead of resisting it.

“The directions laid down in the word of God leave no room for compromise with evil. The Son of God was manifested that He might draw all men unto Himself. He came not to lull the world to sleep, but to point out the narrow path in which all must travel who reach at last the gates of the City of God. His children must follow where He has led the way; at whatever sacrifice of ease or selfish indulgence, at whatever cost of labor or suffering, they must maintain a constant battle with self.”<sup>1</sup>

“While we are to love the souls for whom Christ died, we are to make no compromise with evil. We are not to unite with the rebellious and call this charity. God requires His people in this age of the world to stand for the right as unflinchingly as did John in opposition to soul-destroying errors.”<sup>2</sup>

“True prosperity is dependent on the continuance of our covenant relationship with God. Never can we afford to compromise principle by entering into alliance with those who do not fear Him.

“There is constant danger that professing Christians will come to think that in order to have influence with worldlings, they must to a certain extent conform to the world. But though such a course may appear to afford great advantages, it always ends in spiritual loss. Against every subtle influence that seeks entrance by means of flattering inducements from the enemies of truth, God’s people must strictly guard. They are pilgrims and strangers in this world, traveling a path beset with danger. To the ingenious subterfuges and alluring inducements held out to tempt from allegiance, they must give no heed.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 565.  
2. Ellen G. White, Acts of the Apostles (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1911), 555.  
3. Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1917), 570.



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



**What stands out to you in the chiasm of Nehemiah?**

**What are the Onos in your life?**

**Why is it so hard to say no?**

**What is the difference between obstinacy and discernment?**

**Though the story took place more than two millennia ago, how are things still exactly the same?**

**What are practical ways that we can seek the kingdom of God first?**