

Sword and Stone

By Jason P. Hilburn

In Nehemiah's day (444 B.C.), the walls of Jerusalem were lying in ruins—a result of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Although the Jews had returned home from captivity in 536 B.C., and the temple had been rebuilt in 515 B.C., the walls of Jerusalem were still in disrepair after almost 150 years. This upset Nehemiah, who spearheaded an effort to rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2-6). However, the enemies of God's people tried to stop the efforts to rebuild.

The account of God's people and their diligence in the face of opposition during Nehemiah's day is truly inspiring. The Book of Nehemiah reveals a people of faith who built the walls of Jerusalem, basically with a sword in one hand and a stone in the other! Christians in the Lord's church today can learn from these battle-ready builders of Nehemiah's day.

They saw the need and got to work. *“So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work”* (Nehemiah 4:6; cf. 2:3,11,17). Christians should have this same mindset. We need to see the need for evangelism and begin the work immediately: *“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together”* (John 4:35-36).

They built the wall, stone by stone. Each Christian is a living stone in Christ's spiritual house (I Peter 2:5; cf. Hebrews 3:6). Christians should consider themselves laborers concerned about building up the Lord's church by adding as many living stones as possible (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; II Timothy 2:2).

They had enemies who wanted them to fail: *“But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it”* (Neh. 4:7-8). Even today, many who are misled will do practically anything to thwart the efforts of God's faithful followers (Proverbs 14:12; Luke 23:34; John 15:18-21; 16:2-3; Acts 8:1-3; 9:4-5; 23:1; 26:9-11; II Tim. 3:12; I Peter 4:16).

They prayed to God and trusted in Him as they labored. When the Israelites considered their task and saw their opposition, they immediately prayed to God for His divine assistance: *“And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against*

Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God..." (Neh. 4:8-9). Christians must realize that our task will be unsuccessful without divine help (Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 10:23; John 15:4-5,16; 16:23). Prayer should be made to God without ceasing for evangelistic efforts: "...*The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest*" (Luke 10:2; cf. I Corinthians 16:9; II Corinthians 2:12; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:3; I Thessalonians 5:17; II Thessalonians 3:1).

After they sought God's assistance, they became diligent in watching for the enemy: "*Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them*" (Neh. 4:9; cf. 4:13,14,22). Christians must be on guard day and night against the wiles of the devil, lest we are found helplessly asleep while the enemy approaches on our watch (Romans 13:11-14; I Thessalonians 5:1-9; I Peter 5:8).

They held a weapon in one hand and worked with the other: "...*every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon...*" (Neh. 4:17). What a great example for Christians to follow today! While the Christian's main task is the work of evangelism, Christians must also be ready always to defend the Truth against the forces of Satan and those who serve him (Ephesians 6:10-17; I Timothy 1:18; II Timothy 2:3-4; I Peter 3:15; 5:8; Jude 3). Therefore, in a sense, Christians must wield the Sword of the Spirit in one hand while adding living stones with the other.

They looked out for one another, ready to help any of their brothers in need: "*In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us...*" (Neh. 4:20; cf. 4:19-22). When there was a need, the entire group would gather to meet the challenge. Today members of the Lord's body need to function together as a unit, collectively gathering to help one another face any arising challenges (Numbers 32:6-7; John 17:20-23; Acts 2:44-46; Romans 12:13,15; 15:25-26; I Corinthians 12:25-26). Brethren who are on the front lines of battle need other brethren to "uphold their hands" as Aaron and Hur did for Moses (Exodus 17:11-12; cf. II Timothy 4:7,16).

Both men and women were actively involved: "*And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters*" (Neh. 3:12). Although God does not allow women to hold positions of authority over men in the church (I Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-ff; I Corinthians 11:3; 14:34-35), women are an invaluable part of the kingdom of Christ. Paul wrote that certain women had labored with him in the Gospel (Philippians 4:3), and there are many Biblical examples of godly women who had a great impact for good (Luke 21:1-4; John 12:3-8; Romans 16:1; Acts 9:36-39; 16:14-15; 18:26; II Timothy 1:5; Titus 2:3-5, etc.). Godly women can still do great things today!

Because of their faith in God and their diligence, they succeeded. They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem in only 52 days (Neh. 6:15). This was a tremendous accomplishment, especially considering the circumstances. Although Christians have the greatest mission and the greatest enemy, with God on our side we cannot fail! *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

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