

Selah!

(Think About It!)

Dateline: May, 445 BC

[Jerusalem] They surveyed the surrounding wreckage with weeping and a deep sense of hopelessness. The older men knew they didn't have enough strength any more to make a difference and the younger ones who were usually ready for anything just stared blankly. It was

Nothing was left standing; crumbled stone and brick was strewn everywhere in huge mounds. At the same time, their 'neighbors' hissed and mocked with surreal voices which rose and fell amid the din of the silent reality.

Dateline: May, 445 BC

[Shushan] It was beautiful day: The splendid courts of the palace were alive with brilliant colors – dazzling gardens in full bloom, courtiers in festive gowns and everywhere paintings, tapestries and fountains dancing playfully with sparkling mist and bubbles. Melodious singing filled the air and laughter seemed to play in the breeze.

Here in the court, Nehemiah was a trusted servant of King Artaxerxes I who ruled the vast Medio-Persian empire. The beloved capital of his people, Jerusalem, had been in ruins for some 70 years when the first group of faithful Jews returned to the land and it was now about 92 years later. Having learned that the wall of the city was still broken down and its gates burned with fire, he wept and mourned. In those days, a city without walls and gates was not governable – it was an open prey to any and all who chose to abuse it.

Likewise, we as Christians need walls – NOT walls between one another but walls of defense against the spiritual enemies we face. Without them, we too are easy prey – the 'world' and/or our own sin nature then has too much freedom to bother, bully and oppress. This idea of physical wall building around a city is rather foreign to us because military weaponry has made it obsolete. However this isn't the case with the spiritual so let's consider the well known wall-building story in scripture to see what we can glean. (Read the book of Nehemiah.)

Now, Nehemiah, whose name means "Jehovah has comforted" has long been considered by Bible scholars as a type or picture, both in name and action, of the Holy Spirit. And although this picture is evident in many ways, we'll limit our consideration here to his main effort – building the wall surrounding Jerusalem.

To begin, it's interesting to note that those who were oppressing the inhabitants of the area weren't concerned about them until someone arrived who wanted to help them (Neh 2:9, 10). That's how it is in the spirit as well – you'll generally discover spiritual opposition when you demonstrate a desire to be separate from the world so to speak. As long as you blend in, the opposition isn't concerned.

Sanballat and Tobiah, who epitomize the opposition, are interesting pictures as well. They vociferously challenge the wall building knowing that it will end their corrupt domination. Sanballat's name means "sin (or the moon god)

has given life". As such, he is clearly representative of the sinful world and the lusts thereof. Tobiah, on the other hand, means "goodness of Jehovah" and is a representation of the traitorous compromiser or compromising sin nature. Both these enemies – the ungodly world around us and our own sin-natures, are menaces to our wall building in the spirit.

In Nehemiah, chapters two through six, we see that their tactics are:

-- **Accusation** (Neh 2:29). Just as they accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king, a tactic that had worked before (see Ezra 4), we are often reminded of our own sin and rebellious failings as we seek to 'build'.

-- **Mockery** (Neh 4:1,2). This is intended to belittle, to make us believe that we are not up to the task of building, to disbelieve the scripture that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phi 4:13)

-- **Doubts and degrading** (Neh 4:3). This is used to set us up to believe that our work in obedience to the Lord is worthless and meaningless which is absolutely not true. (1 Cor 15:58)

-- **Anger, threatened attacks and confusion** (Neh 4:7,8). This is for intimidation. However, we must remember that there's a BIG difference between what the enemies threaten or plan and what they can actually do. Our Father is on the throne. (Col 2:14,15)

-- **Fear** (Neh 4:10-12). When our faith fails, fear becomes an effective weapon. This is when we need to be reminded that, "God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and a strong mind." (1Tim 1:7) also, Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body

but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Math 10:28)

-- Distractions (Neh 6:1-4). This is a powerful strategy – if our enemy can just get us in a dialog... whoa! Remember, that's what happened to Eve. (Eph 5:11)

-- **Lies and character assassination** (Neh 6:5-9, 10-13). These are saved until the end because they're the big guns so to speak. By this point, the work of wall building is nearly complete and this is used to focus attention upon the wall builder – to accuse him of self-righteousness, self-promotion – to get people to believe that the motive and thus the character of the wall builder is suspect. Our motives must always be LOVING OBEDIENCE to our Lord – never self-satisfaction or elevation.

However, in submission to Nehemiah's guidance, the people who built displayed:

-- **Courage** (Neh 4:14). "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love." (1Cor 16:13,14)

-- **Guarding** (Neh 4:13). This is alertness. (2Tim 4:5, Eph 6:18)

-- **Readiness** (Neh 4:16-18). By laboring with weapons in hand, they were an example of diligence and preparedness. The Bible tells us that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual and that we are to be at the ready as well. (2Cor 10:4, Eph 6:11-13)

-- **Honesty and cooperation** (Neh 4:19,20). Truthfulness about our 'wall-building' especially in prayer is paramount. It can be a big task. As my pastor says, 'We're all 'projects.'" It doesn't help to pretend you're

'together' when you know you're not.
-- **A mind to work** (Neh 4:6). This pictures faith and perseverance.

-- **Clothed** (Neh 4:23). Clothed? Yes, that is putting full confidence in the robe of Christ's righteousness – wearing it and never putting it aside.

As a consequence, the wall surrounding Jerusalem was completed in just 52 days. Now, this is radical, for that's the exact time between Christ's death on the cross and the outpouring of His Spirit on Pentecost. That is, it's the period between when the veil or barrier between God and man was torn open and the separation or barrier between the redeemed and the world was made obvious through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Selah!

Now, it's important to understand, as we're discussing wall-building that we aren't talking about erecting some fortress mentality – individually or corporately – with respect to evangelism or our call to be salt and light in this world. Rather, we're dealing with the real, pragmatic need for spiritual defenses and personal holiness.

So what do these walls represent? I'll suggest that they picture the strength or integrity of our mind or soul. You see, that's where the battles are really fought, aren't they? And the gates represent our reasoning, reckoning or judgments – entry points so to speak. In fact, the Hebrew word for gate is derived from the verb meaning to reason, think or reckon.

David, in Psalm 51, after confessing his sin with Bathsheba, the failing of his character, prays, “*Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build the walls of Jerusalem.*”

In Psalm 122, we read, “*Peace be within thy walls.*” and are reminded of the scripture, “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusteth in Thee.*” (Isa 26:3)

So how then are my walls built? I know the Bible says to “*Gird up the loins of your mind.*” (1Pet 1:13) Practically, what does that mean? Hypnosis? Psycho-therapy? Primal scream?? No.

To answer that, let's look at who built the wall with Nehemiah. There are exactly 52 named individuals or groups who labored on the wall. Some commentators try to create some pretty exotic interpretations of this and others are almost cynical in countering that there's nothing symbolic to be derived. I'll tell what I believe and you can decide for yourself.

I've studied each individual and group and something consistent and powerful emerges – all of them have names that speak clearly of a condition or attitude of the redeemed. I won't cover them all – you can as you have opportunity – but let's look at a representative few (See Neh 3):

-- *Eliashib means 'God restores'*
-- *Zaccur and the sons of Hassenaah combine to mean [He's] 'mindful [that we're] sons of thorny' that is, sons of Adam if you would.*
-- *Jehoida means 'Jehovah knows'*
-- *Meshullam means 'friend'*
-- *Melatiah means 'Jehovah delivered'*
-- *Jadon means 'thankful'*
-- *Uzziel means 'my strength is God'*
-- *Hannaniah means 'God has favored'*
-- *Rephaiah means 'healed of Jehovah'*
-- *Jedaiah means 'praised of Jehovah'*
-- *Malchijah means 'my King is Jehovah'*

-- *Hashabiah and Bevai combined to mean 'Jehovah has considered my goings'*

-- *Azariah means 'Jehovah has ransomed'*

-- *Zadok means 'righteous'*

-- *Shemaiah means 'heard by Jehovah'*

On it goes. Each one amplifies the unified chorus of the redeemed and as such, I'll suggest that they pretty dramatically represent the attitudes that edify the saint individually and the church corporately. The scripture says, “*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*” (Phi 4:8)

So John, are you telling me that by adopting the attitude of the redeemed, by being heavenly minded, that I build my walls of spiritual defense, that I am sanctified and I become a major threat to the enemy of my soul? Yep.

OK, but I feel like I'm in a continual building project! I get a wall up and then there's a breach to fill again. What's up?

Breaches are the consequences of sin. In this life, our walls crumble because they are made of 'stone or brick' so to speak – they're earthy and imperfect. However, we must rebuild them in faith – faith that believes the truths expressed in the names of Nehemiah's men and women.

And as long as we are here, we'll need to continue a maintenance schedule if you would – continue believing, really believing, that we're redeemed and forgiven. I don't mean believing because we prayed a specific prayer, said the right words, had the right attitude or read the right scriptures. That's all good, but we're

not forgiven because Father God has to and therefore does so grudgingly. We're not forgiven because of some sort of legal technicality or loop-hole.

But the enemies of our souls want us to believe exactly that – if they can't convince us that we're lost, they want us to believe our sins are bad enough to diminish God's love toward us – that the cross may atone for them BUT...

Now, you may have carried some baggage around with you for quite some time believing just that – I did. You know your own 'earthiness', your own character flaws and failures. You know your own breaches and that you've been careless in guarding the 'gates' at times. Oh you know you're forgiven, but you subtly doubt you're still ravishing in God's sight, still loved as passionately. You know you're accepted but doubt that you'll be welcomed in.

Listen. You're accepted and forgiven IN Christ because God loves you furiously, relentlessly, unabashedly, inexhaustibly – read Ephesians 1:3-6. Believe it! And although your present walls consist of 'stone and brick' (it's our present portion), God sees the end result, the walls of your New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12-21) – magnificent, clear, sparkling gems – they speak of your heavenly wall, your heavenly character (1Jn 3:2, 1Cor 13:12). Huge, perfect pearls – they portray the endless covering of your grit by His grace.

A final thought -- Isaiah prophesies that one day, “*... you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.*” Heavenly mindedness, Selah!