

February 22

Scriptures: Read Nehemiah 3 & 4

Key Verse: “Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them [the adversaries] we set a watch against them day and night.” (Nehemiah 4:9)

Overview

Nehemiah had set his mind on a goal — to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem — and since he knew it was the will of God, and that the Lord was with them, he persisted, despite much opposition. He was a good administrator and leader. He encouraged the people and wisely delegated the work in a well-organized and effective way, that it might be accomplished quickly and efficiently.

The majority of the men responded to Nehemiah’s call, including those from towns outside of Jerusalem, and even the daughters of Hallohesh are mentioned as working alongside their father (3:12). Jerusalem held a special place in the heart of the Jews, since it was the city of God and represented their first love and true worship of the Lord their God (Psalm 137:5-6). If this Jerusalem, which is temporal, held such a place in their hearts, how much more should we, as believers in the Lord Jesus, look with longing hearts to our eternal Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 11:10; Revelation 21:2).

One effective method that Nehemiah employed was to have those whose homes were near a certain section of the wall repair that particular section (3:10, 23, 28-30). Also, the priests and Levites were to make the repairs along the wall in their district of the city, and the merchants whose shops were near the sheep gate (where the animals for the Temple sacrifices would be sold) were to make repairs on that area (3:32). Naturally, they would do their best to fortify the area of wall nearest their homes and work places, in order to better protect their families and their livelihood. This method would also give rise to a healthy competition which would cause them to take much pride in their work by making the strongest and most beautiful wall. Even though they worked in many separate groups, they were still unified, since they had the same goal. Nehemiah’s strong and wise leadership was essential, but even more essential were the many prayers that went up to heaven.

The heathen adversaries were angered to see the Jews rebuilding the walls, but since Artaxerxes had approved, they could take no official action against it, as they had previously done (Ezra 4:21-23); therefore, they turned to hurling insults in order to demoralize the workers, but since “the people had a mind to work” (4:6), they ignored the mockery and continued to work diligently (cf. Luke 9:62). Nehemiah’s faith in God guaranteed success, and it encouraged, motivated, and helped the people to build their faith and courage. He helped them not to look at the difficult circumstances but rather to the Lord, who gave them the strength to keep building, even when faced with terrible opposition.

One might ask, “Why the opposition?” The Jews and these heathen people had been enemies for a long time, and there was much animosity between them. The political reason was that the Samaritans feared losing their economic power and place of prominence in the area; if

Jerusalem's walls were built, it would attract more business and more trade than Samaria, since it was in a better location (along a major trade route).

When the walls were already half-way built in height, the opposition planned to take an even greater action against them. This time they conspired together to make a secret attack. The reason they had to conspire in secret was because the attack did not have the king's support. Providentially, their attack plans were discovered (likely through a spy) and made public knowledge. The enemies' evil plans were frustrated. Nehemiah once again turned to the Lord in prayer, and accompanying his prayer were watchfulness and preparedness. Half of the men were to be armed and ready for battle, while the other half continued to work. Nehemiah himself was a good example; all during the building, he remained prepared and ready for battle, both day and night. Prayer, work, watchfulness, and readiness are essential for serving the Lord and accomplishing the task of building His Kingdom, as well as being armed and ready for warfare against Satan.

Prayer

Lord, You gave wise administrative gifts to Nehemiah and gave the people enthusiastic willingness to work hard. Grant us the willingness and ability to co-operate fully for the work we have to do for You.