

# What the Wall Speaks Of

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The broken wall represents a state of bankruptcy, bondage, and death, but rebuilding it means recovering the Lord's testimony in fullness and making the Lord's people a free people.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:2-3, Nehemiah 5:5, Isaiah 61:1, Malachi 3:8-9, Luke 4:18, Acts 22:25, Romans 8:15, Galatians 5:1, Hebrews 2:15, 1 John 4:18

**Topics:** "Freedom in Christ", "Restoration of Testimony"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the spiritual significance of Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, illustrating the need for the Lord's people to recover their testimony of freedom and deliverance from bondage. He highlights that the broken wall symbolizes the spiritual bankruptcy and fear that results from living under the law, contrasting it with the liberty found in Christ. Sparks calls for a restoration of purity, joy, and the acknowledgment of Christ's finished work, urging believers to live as free sons rather than in fear of the law. He stresses the importance of giving God the first place in all aspects of life, as represented by the tithe, to fully experience the richness of God's grace. Ultimately, the wall serves as a bulwark against fear and a testament to the freedom and wealth of God's people.

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## Transcript

Reading: Nehemiah 5:2-6; Luke 4:14-21; II Kings 4:1-4.

In these messages we are allowing Nehemiah, that great servant of the Lord in the old dispensation, to illustrate for us, and to lead us in relation to, the recovering of the Lord's testimony in fullness. Nehemiah said that he was "doing a great work" and that God had put this in his heart. Our concern is with the great work, spiritually corresponding to that which Nehemiah accomplished historically in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, which God would do in our time. We are going to look now at some of those things which lay behind the broken state of the wall of Jerusalem. We have observed that the condition of the wall was an illustration or representation of the spiritual condition of the Lord's people at that time. The reasons for the condition of the wall were to be found in the life of the people themselves. We look through the wall to see why it was so, and in so doing we have no difficulty in making a transition from that time to our own time, with a view to seeing what the state is and what needs to be done.

A State of Bankruptcy, Bondage and Death

The fifth chapter of Nehemiah brings to us the first of the conditions, the particular conditions, which characterized this broken wall, or the people of God as they were at that time reflected in their wall. They were in bondage and bankruptcy. If you could have looked at that wall, you would have said: 'That is a fairly good picture of the bankrupt state of the Lord's people just now.' And that state was a complete contradiction to the mind and will of the Lord. It was a contradiction to the liberty and affluence of the Lord's people, as He willed it for them. "We bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants" (Neh. 5:5). And the Lord Jesus came and proclaimed in prophetic words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,... to proclaim release to the captives,... to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18). That is really the mind of the Lord for His people. Bondage always speaks of law and tyranny, and therefore fear. Those things always go together - bondage, law, tyranny, and resultant fear, a life of fear.

### The Rebuilt Wall A Bulwark Against Fear

You will recall another of those incidents in the life of the prophet Elisha, recorded in the second book of the Kings, chapter 4. You know the story, but here it is, gathered into a very few sentences. Death has entered in; the creditor has come demanding payment of that which it is impossible to provide. The law is at the door, threatening to bring into bondage, and fear has taken possession. Over against that situation there is Elisha, the man whom we know to represent and embody the law of the Spirit of life, who is always dealing with situations of death and their consequences. And so Elisha comes on the scene, and by providing life, by exercising "the law of the Spirit of life", he makes it possible to meet all the obligations, satisfies the creditor, destroys the fear, and releases the sons.

That is a beautiful picture of much New Testament truth. Indeed the letter to the Galatians is the interpretation of that little incident. That letter, as you know, deals with sonship in bondage, and shows that the way of release is by the Spirit of life, liberty by the Spirit.

Well, that sets the ground for this application of the message. The Lord Jesus, you see, said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to set at liberty them that are bruised". It is the Spirit over against the law, the Spirit of life over against the law of sin and death. The Apostle says: "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). To the Galatians the Apostle said: "For freedom did Christ set us free; stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1). Again says the Apostle to the same people, 'We were in bondage under the law, but Christ has come over against our bondage to the law' (4:3-5). There are those words in the letter to the Hebrews, so familiar: "... and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15).

What does that mean - "through fear of death"? If you look at the context in the letter to the Hebrews, it is perfectly plain that it is the fear of the consequence of violating the law. That letter is all over against the law, and those Jews knew quite well what the penalty was for violating the law. We know from reading incidents in the Old Testament what it meant for people who violated the law. In some instances they were taken out and stoned; it was death. And so the law hung over them like a sword; they lived in this fear and dread that they might violate the law, and so incur death. "All their lifetime", because of this law, they were "subject to bondage" "through fear of death". But hear the words of another: "There is no fear in love: because perfect love casteth out fear" (I John 4:18). How true it is!

What is this wall then? Well, in its broken condition it means that something has happened to bring about death. That something is a reign of law which could not be met. The creditor could not be appeased, be

satisfied. The law was the creditor. Break the law, and you go into bondage, into servitude; it is death, death to everything, death while you live, to be under that awful burden of the law. Rebuilding the wall, then, just means that in some way a testimony is being recovered that the Lord's people are a free people, that the creditor is paid off and sent about his business, he is satisfied. It means that death has been destroyed, bondage has been broken. They are not only out; they are not merely free, but left poor: they are made affluent with heavenly riches, as the Lord's free and wealthy people.

Do you not agree that there is a need for something like that to be recovered amongst the people of God today? Whether it is Old Testament law or New Testament law, a great many people are not enjoying the liberty of life in the Spirit. Even the New Testament, with its great doctrines, has been crystallized into a system of law, and people are browbeaten by it. Fundamentalism is like that. Fundamentalism, as such, can become just another system of law without life. The truths of it are right, but by itself it falls into the category of that of which the Apostle spoke when he drew a distinction between the letter and the spirit (Rom. 7:6).

In effect he said, 'You can have the letter which is perfectly right, perfectly accurate, perfectly true, but even the truth in accuracy can become something that brings you into bondage and robs you of your liberty and your joy and your wealth.' In other words, the fact that you are perfectly orthodox and correct in your doctrine is not proof that you are one of the Lord's free people enjoying this wealth and this affluence of the Lord. You may be going about with that heavy burden of orthodoxy around your neck and not happy in your Christianity at all, lest you might be violating some principle, some truth. You can be a very miserable person in absolute orthodoxy and correctness of teaching and doctrine. No: while the doctrine must be right, and while we must be in the truth, there is that extra factor which means that you and I are God's liberated people; we are enjoying the liberty of the Spirit and the life of the Spirit.

So this wall represents or speaks of a bulwark against fear. Any city wall means that. That is what it is for, if it is worth its name; and, mark you, they used to build walls very soundly and very thoroughly in those days. They were no jerry-built things that would go over, whatever Tobiah may say - "If a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall" (Neh. 4:3). Let all the foxes in creation go up against this wall and they will not upset it. Walls are meant to be bulwarks against fear. You get inside that wall, and you are safe, you are free from fear - free from the sense of being brought into captivity. That is the meaning of the wall.

Now the testimony that the Lord would have should be after that kind - that the Lord's people know that they are in an absolutely sure and safe place. They need have no fear at all: all fear is destroyed; they are not in the bondage of fear. They have been gloriously delivered. To use the words of the Galatian letter again, they are sons. They are not slaves; they have come now to a Father. They are not just pupils - for the Apostle, as you know, says that the law was our tutor (Gal. 3:24). But we are not any longer under the tutor. We are sons, not pupils; we are sons, not prisoners. As sons, we are free.

The wall, then, speaks of safety, security, of deliverance from the bondage of fear - and oh that the Lord might have a people like that!

Now, what is your testimony? The Lord's testimony truly is like that. What is yours? Are you living in bondage - New Testament bondage - bondage to fear? Are you living every day in fear of doing wrong, under the threat of the 'big stick', even the stick of your own conscience? Are you in fear, with a miserable face, because of this awful tyranny? That is not the Lord's will for us. The Lord wants His people completely delivered from fear: for "ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received

the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

### All Debts Paid

This wall, then, also speaks of debts all paid and the rich emoluments of grace. That is simple, basic Gospel, but it is glorious. All debts paid, the creditor satisfied. The Lord Jesus did that for us in His Cross. He paid all the debt to the law, satisfied the law, and sent the creditor about his business. He set us free from him - the law; set us free from all our debts. Oh, it is a wonderful thing to know that all your spiritual debts are paid. It is a terrible thing to know that you have to face up to that law of God and answer to it - that, if someone does not pay your debts, you have somehow to meet that demand in time and eternity. But the true child of God, who knows what Christ has done for him or for her, is always ready to sing -

Free from the law - oh, happy condition!

Jesus hath bled, and there is remission.

### The Franchise of the Heavenly Jerusalem

Then this wall, being the wall of Jerusalem, pointing to another Jerusalem, a spiritual heavenly Jerusalem, speaks of the heavenly franchise, the franchise of the heavenly Jerusalem, heaven's free men.

You remember on one occasion, when the Apostle Paul was taken prisoner, he was brought to the Roman centurion, and was going to be examined by scourging: that is, they were going to apply the 'third degree' method of getting out of him what all this was about. Our translation does not give us the full force of what was taking place. It just tells us that he was 'tied up'. Really literally it is: 'they had stretched him out'; and this method applied by the Romans was a very severe one indeed. So terrible was the laying on with the scourges, the man having been stretched out with his hands and feet securely tied, that it often resulted in death, or in being crippled for life. When Paul was placed in that position, he asked: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25). The officer, thinking he had a good case, replied: "With a great sum obtained I this citizenship". 'I bought my freedom to do as I like - I am just exercising my right as a free man, for which I have paid a great price.' Paul answered: "But I was free born" (A.V.).

Now, when the senior officer was told what Paul had said, a terrible fear came over him that he should have taken a free man, a free-born citizen of the Roman Empire, and not only brought him into chains and bonds, but have come within an inch of thrashing him. A free-born man should not be dealt with like that. He had the franchise of the Empire behind him. Even more was it to be free-born than to buy your freedom. To be free-born meant that you could not be brought into bondage, you could not be thrashed, you could not be dealt with like that, and woe betide the man who essayed to do it - he had to answer to the Emperor. All the strength of the Roman Empire was behind the man who was free-born, and Paul knew what that meant. So the officer became full of terror when he realized that he was treating a free-born man like this.

Do you see the illustration? Yes: we are first-born sons, says the Word; our names are enrolled in heaven, we have the franchise of the Kingdom of God; we cannot be brought into bondage, we cannot be thrashed by the law, we cannot be dealt with like this, dealt with so hardily, by this tyrant. No matter what his claims may be of right to do it, there is a higher claim. It is the claim of sonship. You cannot deal with God's sons as you deal with other people. It is a wonderful illustration of this great truth.

The wall of Jerusalem means that here is something which is the enclosure of a heavenly people, who have been delivered from bondage, set at liberty from all debts, and are walking in the good of sonship - God's free people and God's wealthy people. That is the truth of the Word of God. Sonship is something to be enjoyed, and that wall is no picture of joy and the state of those people is no picture of joy. It is a contradiction to what the Lord would have. This is how He would have it, as we have just seen.

#### A Restored Sabbath

Now the next thing - the Sabbath. There are fourteen references to the Sabbath Day in the book of Nehemiah. It is a matter of the nullified Sabbath. If you want proof of that, go to Malachi, the contemporary of Nehemiah; you know what he has to say about it. But here in this book of Nehemiah fourteen times the Sabbath is mentioned, so it has a very large place. We know that these people represented the nullifying of the Sabbath. Now I am not going to start on an argument for Seventh Day Adventism or for Sabbatarianism; the ground is very much higher and more glorious than that. But remember that the Sabbath was the oldest covenant in existence. God rested from His labours on the seventh day, and God hallowed the seventh day and demanded that it should be hallowed all the way through. If you will look the matter up, you will see how much in the life of the people of God, for good or for ill, was bound up with their observance of the Sabbath, the covenant of the Sabbath - perhaps the foundation covenant, the covenant of all covenants.

But what did it mean? Of course, it was a foreshadowing of Christ. God rested from His labour, from all His works, on the seventh day, "and God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it" (Gen. 2:2,3). Israel went into captivity in Babylon because they had not kept the Lord's Sabbaths - the seventh day, the seventh month, the seventh year and the sevens of sevens up to forty-nine. They had failed to observe the Sabbath in all its connections, so He sent them into Babylon for seventy years because of His Sabbaths. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). It is the 'whatsoever' always. And now that broken-down wall speaks of the broken Sabbath, the nullified Sabbath: and Nehemiah is found restoring the Sabbath, and you know he did it in a very vigorous way. When the merchants came to the gates on the Sabbath Day, he chased them away, he handled them very roughly, and restored the Sabbath.

What is it all about? I have said that it pointed on to Christ - Christ who, in the new creation, has finished all God's works, the works of a new creation; has brought again satisfaction to God, and God into His rest, the rest of His satisfaction: so that Christ and His accomplished work are now the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not a day; it is a Person. The Sabbath is not a time matter at all. The Sabbath is a work finished, and so any violation of it is severely dealt with by the Lord. It means this - take one little bit away from the fully accomplished work of Christ and the absolute satisfaction of God with Him, and you violate the principle of the Sabbath, you undercut the covenant. If that were only realized, it would destroy Seventh Day Adventism in five minutes. Well, you say, are we not to observe the Lord's Day? Oh, yes - but as a testimony, not as a matter of law. We come together now on one day, the first day of the week, to celebrate the glorious truth that God is satisfied with His Son - that is, we gather around His Table and worship in the values of Jesus Christ, God's ground of satisfaction. Take anything from that and you violate the Sabbath.

Now the testimony to be recovered just means that there must be a people who are enjoying the fact, rejoicing in the great reality, that the work of redemption is finished gloriously: God is at rest, completely satisfied, and His people have entered into His rest. It is very simple, perhaps, as it is put like that, but are we not tested on this thing? Almost every day of our lives we are tested about the Sabbath - not merely as

a day, but as to our rest in God's satisfaction, as to our contentment with God's contentment: in other words, as to our apprehension of the fact that Christ has altogether finished the new creation in Himself, and has brought God an answer to His last demand and requirement. God wants a people who are rejoicing in that; He wants a testimony like that. The Lord make us a people after that kind! The wall speaks of that, because, as you notice, as soon as the wall is completed, Nehemiah, who had paid his visit back to Babylon and returned, began to put the Sabbath in its place and clean up everything in relation to the Sabbath.

### Restored Purity of Blood

One more thing for the moment - the state of mixture which existed. We are told that the children of the people could not speak in the Hebrew language. They spoke half in one language, half in another. And then we read about the mixed marriages with the people of the nations outside - so many of the men had foreign wives. Here were elements, features, of mixture amongst the Lord's people, and Nehemiah set to work to clean that up. He did it very thoroughly - and, thank God, the people co-operated with him. It was necessary as a spiritual principle that this should be done; but here again, mixture being one of the conditions represented by the wall - the wall was broken down and destroyed because there was not a purity in Israel - in its rebuilding it was a bulwark against mixture of blood.

That says something very strong and very definite - the necessity for everyone who claims to have any place in the city of God, in the Church of God, in the Kingdom of God, to be able to prove that their blood is pure, that they really are born from above, they have the pure life of the Lord in them, they are not a mixed people in their constitution - they are a people of one tongue, of one language, of one blood, of one life. The wall being re-erected was to be a testimony to a 'cleaning up' in this matter of mixture among the Lord's people: a purity of blood, a purity of language, a purity of worship.

You know how possible it is to mix these things up. You very often find people who are talking the language or the phraseology, but you hardly recognize it as the language of the Spirit. Oh, they have got all the Christian phraseology, but there is a lot of mixture here, a lot of contradiction in the life here. There must be a people of a pure language, those who truly speak the language of the Spirit. Is it not true that there are many professing Christians who do not speak the language of the Spirit? Many of you know what I mean. Yes, you miss something. There is something about their way of speaking of 'Christianity' and 'religion' which does not say that they have really been born from above.

### The Restored Tithe

And I close with this other thing - defaulting in the tithe. Malachi, who depicts the conditions at that time, charges the people with defaulting in the matter of the Lord's tithe. He says, speaking from God: "Ye rob me, even this whole nation." "But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Mal. 3:9,8). There was default in the matter of the tithe.

But what is this? Oh, do not think that we can get out of this by just taking a tenth part of our earnings and giving it to the Lord. You can do that and not be giving the tithe at all. What does it mean, this tithe? It was like this. Tithes were given of everything - of their earnings, of their field, of their vineyard, of their flocks; and what happened was that the farmer or the husbandman or the shepherd would watch carefully for the first ripe fruits, the first product to reach maturity, the first animal to come forth, to come into life, to live. He watched, as, supposing it were the field, the corn was growing, and as the time drew near he would take a walk out to see the state of the corn and watch for the first ripe ears: and as soon as he saw ripe ears, he

did not wait for the whole harvest to ripen, he took them to the house of God, and he said, in effect: 'This represents the fact that all belongs to You, Lord. This is a forerunner, a first-fruit of what is to come. It is all Yours, and I give this as a token that it is all Yours, that You have the first place and the whole place.' If it were the fruit, the husbandman did the same. If it were the shepherd, he took the firstling of the flock and said: 'Lord, this is the firstling of this flock; it betokens that all is Yours - Yours is the first place, and Yours shall be the whole place.'

That is the tithe. The tithe is not something detached and given to God, while we have the rest. It is a token that the Lord has the place from beginning to end. Now, you see, that was the trouble with Israel - defaulting in the matter of the tithe - and that was why the testimony had broken down. The Lord did not have the first place and the whole place in all their interests, in all their matters, in all their possessions. The Lord wants a people like that, who really do bear that testimony. He would raise up the wall of testimony again in a people who do not just give Him a place, a part, but who give Him the whole place, and are always on the look-out as to how they can bring Him that which is His right - a people like that.

Suffer the simplicity of these words, but they go deeper than perhaps you recognize. They touch very vital matters. All this is very practical. When Nehemiah put these things right, he was not just building a wall. He was putting right the things which the wall represented; the testimony was supported by spiritual reality behind. That is what the Lord wants.

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