

From Babylon to Jerusalem - (Nehemiah) ch.3 & 4

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of separation, purity, and cooperation in God's work, using the story of Nehemiah's wall as a picture of the commandments of Jesus and the body of Christ.

Duration: 1:00:29

Scripture: Nehemiah 2:13, Nehemiah 3:15-20, Nehemiah 3:27, Nehemiah 4:6, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 3:13

Topics: "From Babylon To Jerusalem"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being vigilant against the enemy while remaining committed to God's work. The people in the story were wholeheartedly serving the Lord, even though they were scattered and faced opposition. The enemy tried to hinder their work through mocking and making fun of them. The speaker also highlights the danger of murmuring and complaining, urging listeners to instead give thanks and avoid negativity. The sermon draws from the book of Nehemiah and encourages believers to stay focused on God's work despite challenges.

Transcript

In the book of Nehemiah, in our last study, we were looking at the closing verses of chapter two. And we saw that as Nehemiah began his plan to build the wall, there was opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah and Gishen, Nehemiah chapter two, verse nineteen. And Nehemiah answered them in verse twenty and said to them, the God of heaven will give us success.

It's a very wonderful example we see there of Nehemiah not desiring the cooperation or help of any of those, symbolically speaking, nominal Christians, or of those who were carnally minded. He said, God will help us, and therefore we, his servants, will arise and build. But you, who are carnally minded and worldly minded, have no portion, rite, or memorial in Jerusalem.

To build the church of Jesus Christ, we do not seek the cooperation of carnally minded believers. No, they can sit on the sidelines and observe, but to build Jerusalem, we need those who are disciples and who are spiritually minded. So there we have Nehemiah taking a clear stance as to who could participate in this work.

Very often there is an attitude that if we have more people to help, that's better. No, if the quality of those who seek to do God's work is not one of purity and total commitment to the Lord, it's better not to have such people cooperating in God's work. God would rather have a few people who are totally committed than a great multitude of compromisers.

And that's why Nehemiah said, we, his servants, will build, but you, you have no portion, and we cannot cooperate with you in building the church, the body of Christ. And then we read in chapter three about the building of the wall, and we have seen that the wall speaks about separation. And we considered in our last study that each row of bricks represents the commandments of Jesus, and as row after row of bricks is put, keeping all the commandments of Jesus, teaching people to do everything that Jesus has commanded, the wall is built.

And we need to see that, keep that right, keep that in our mind as we study through the building of this wall, that the building of the wall is teaching people to do all the commandments of Jesus, as we read in Matthew 28 and verse 20, in the great commission that Jesus gave to us, to teach people to do all the commandments of Jesus. And it is this wall that has been broken down. It has not been broken down completely.

The walls of Jerusalem were all broken down, means there were big gaps in it, and the height of it was not as high as it should be, and that is a picture of Babylonian Christianity that is selective about the commandments of Jesus. It's got a commandment here and a commandment there, big gaps in the wall in between. But to build the walls of Jerusalem is to proclaim all the commandments of Jesus, the great ones, the small ones, everything, and to teach people to do them.

So we need to keep that in mind as we continue the study of the building of the wall. And also, it's by building this high wall, which is all the commandments of Jesus, that we bring a separation between the true church and carnal Christianity, or Babylonian Christianity, and all the rest of the world. The height of the wall is not determined by us, it's determined by the commandments that Jesus has given.

When we proclaim and teach people to do all that Jesus has commanded, then the wall will reach the right height. We don't want to make it higher than that, but we don't want to make it lower than that. All the commandments of Jesus, that's the height of the wall.

And that will bring a separation between Jerusalem and all the other people who don't want all the commandments of Jesus. And we see this great opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem is primarily directed against proclaiming all the commandments of Jesus, against raising the wall to its proper height. And they are disturbed by that.

And another thing I want you to see is that when this wall was built around Jerusalem, it's only then that Jerusalem could be completely secure from the attacks of the enemy. Because the purpose of a wall, just like the purpose of a wall in a fort, is to protect it from the attacks of the enemy. And so we see that Jesus has given us commandments, and if we keep all of them, they become not only a wall of separation between us and Babylon, but also a wall of security that protects us from Satan's attacks.

And that's why you find so many Christians who are open to Satan's attacks, because they haven't taken all the commandments of Jesus seriously. This wall is our security. So when the wall is built, there you have separation, and there you have security.

And of course, the wall has gates. We know that Jerusalem had twelve gates, and the New Jerusalem also, you read in Revelation 21, has twelve gates. And ten of those gates are mentioned here in Nehemiah chapter three, and two others are mentioned later on in the book of Nehemiah.

That's just by way of information. And these gates have got various names. They're called the Sheep Gate, verse one of chapter three, and another gate is called the Fish Gate in chapter three, verse three.

And of course, these possibly have some symbolic meanings, but it's very easy, particularly if you've got the Brethren type of thinking, to interpret all these in various symbols, and then we can be very fanciful in our interpretation of all the meanings of these gates without any spiritual profit to our own life at all. That's a very dangerous thing, to study the Old Testament in types and symbols without it having any practical application in our daily life. And of course, two people will interpret the same gates in two different ways, and we don't want to go into all that fanciful interpretation to display human cleverness, but we want to pour out our soul to death and hear the voice of the Spirit here, and try to get some spiritual lessons out of the building of the gates and the walls, and the wall described in Nehemiah chapter three.

First of all, we read that the first person who is mentioned who begins the building of the wall is the high priest, and that's a good example in building the body of Christ and the walls of Jerusalem, that the greatest, what did Jesus say he should become? The servant of all. And that's how it must be. Now, that's not true in Babylon.

In Babylon, you don't find the king of Babylon going down and dirtying his hands building a wall, but in Jerusalem, the high priest, who is the leader, is the person who begins the building. He works with his hands. He doesn't just order people around.

He works with his hands, and it says here, Eliasheth, the high priest, chapter three, verse one, with his brothers, who were all priests, built the sheep gate. They consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel.

It's very interesting that the building of the wall begins with the sheep gate, and that, of course, speaks of the cross. Jesus, when he was taken to the cross like a sheep led to his shearers, was dumb. We read that in Isaiah 53, and verse seven, we also read in Romans 8, 36, that we are also led like sheep to the slaughter all day.

I just mentioned that in passing, that the work of building the wall begins with the message of the cross. And it's very interesting that when the wall is completed, in the last verse of Nehemiah 3, not the wall is completed, the chapter, the end of the chapter, it ends also with the sheep gate. It's all the way around from the sheep gate to the sheep gate, from the cross to the cross.

And that is how the body of Christ is built, and the walls are built in Jerusalem. And so we see here, there is no such thing as full-time workers and non-full-time workers in this chapter. You find that the high priests are mixed with the people, businessmen, and the others in secular jobs, and the rulers, they're all mixed up together, and there is no distinction between one group and another.

This is quite unique, because in the Old Testament, the high priest had certain jobs, and the others had other jobs, but when it came to this building of the wall, they're all down at the same level. And it's very important to maintain this equality in the body of Christ, that there is no such thing as a full-time worker being a special brother in the church. That's a lot of garbage that needs to be thrown outside, through the

dung gates, outside Jerusalem.

And we need to come back to the teaching of what we see here in Nehemiah 3, that everybody is down at the same level. And we see here in verse 2, and next to him, and I want you to notice that phrase, next to him, because it occurs a number of times. Notice in verse 4, next to them, next to him, next to him.

Again in verse 5, next to him. Verse 7, next to them. And verse 8, and verse 10, and verse 12, and 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

You find this phrase, after him, next to him, verse 27, 29, 30, 31, right through to the end of the chapter, you find one phrase, next to him, next to them, next to him, next to them. In other words, there was such close cooperation there, there were no gaps, either in the building of the wall, or in these people who were working together. And that requires some degree of an experience of the cross in our life, because we know that human nature is such that we like to choose the people we work with.

And you may find in the church, in a particular responsibility that God gives you, you are placed along with a brother whom you do not naturally like to work with in that particular job. And then it is very evident whether we have cleansed ourselves of this Babylonian spirit of choosing whom we work with, whether we are willing to die and work with anybody whom God has chosen to put with us in that particular task in the church. And there, if we do not know the cross, we cannot have this experience of next to him.

We have got to get victory over all our personal differences and dislikes. And I will tell you, there is a lot of it in our flesh. There is a lot of it in our flesh.

I do not like to work with this brother, I would like to go to the other corner of the wall where a good friend of mine is working and let me work with him. But God has put you next to this brother here. You have got to humble yourself, brother.

And more than humble yourself, you have got to die if you want to work in the place which God has appointed for you in the wall. And on this side is a brother whom you do not particularly like, all your friends are on the other side of the wall, in the other corner, and God has put you here with two or three people in a particular task. And if you stick to it, you will become a spiritual man.

If you leave it and run off to join your friends, you will remain a carnal Christian even after twenty-five years. And that is the condition of a lot of Christians today, because they have not learned to die in order to work together with anyone that God puts next to them in a particular task appointed for them in the church. And so that is a very important phrase that occurs right through the chapter, and we can see its practical application in our daily life as we work together in the body of Christ, that we get rid of all these personal preferences and die.

And do not choose the way of Adam, but the way of Christ, which is the way of death. Death to all our personal likes and dislikes and personal preferences, particularly in whom we fellowship with and work with. And also, this could be a picture when we see the wall as the commandments of Jesus, each person working together, laying courses of bricks, is a picture of how it must be in the body of Christ, where each brother and sister contributes their portion to building this wall, exhorting one another daily, it says in Hebrews 3.13. When you come together, exhort one another, encourage one another.

That is what they were doing, building the wall, the commandments of Jesus, each person contributing a few bricks and building up the wall. That is how true body ministry is, as it's described in 1 Corinthians 14,

where all prophesy. This idea of one pastor doing all the ministry is another thing we've got to throw out of the dungate if we want to build the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 14 it says, you may all prophesy and get up and exhort one another so that we can build the wall high and Jerusalem can be secure and separated, but we need to see our responsibility there and thus make sure the wall has got no gaps. Do you know what happens when you say, Lord, I don't want to work with this person? I'd like to go to the other corner. What happens is, you're not able to do anything in the other corner in any case because God hasn't appointed that place for you, but the place where God has appointed for you, there's a breach in the wall.

Somebody else has to do your job because you were irresponsible and you were not willing to work with the brothers whom God put next to you in that task in the church. So we see that it is because of the failure of so many believers who are not willing to be in the place that God has appointed for them that they neither grow spiritually themselves and the work of God is tremendously hindered and somebody else has to do that part of the wall which some irresponsible brother who wanted his own personal likes and preferences failed to do and wandered away to some other place. And so that's something that we need to understand and say, Lord, what is the place that you have appointed for me? Let me learn to live with the brothers and sisters.

Have you found, for example, when there are different house groups meeting in different localities, how you would like to go and join another house group in some other locality because of personal preferences and likes and dislikes? You're not willing to die, you want to go where you choose. That is just an indication of these people who won't stick in the place which God has chosen for them. They like to be where they like and therefore we never grow spiritually because we never want to put to death these personal likes and dislikes.

My brothers and sisters, a spiritual man is a man who has died to all his personal likes and dislikes concerning brothers and sisters, concerning food, concerning circumstances, concerning anything. The others are fleshly and soulish. And that's a lesson we can learn right here as we begin.

And then we see here in verse 2, next to him the men of Jericho built and next to them Zakur, the son of Imre, built. And verse 3, the sons of Hazani built a fish gate. And then verse 4, next to them Merimoth and the others mentioned in that chapter also made repairs.

Verse 5, listen to this, moreover, next to him the Techoites made repairs, but their nobles or their leaders did not support the work of their masters. And that's noted. The Holy Spirit has recorded that the leaders in this particular section of the wall did not want to dirty their hands.

That was a sad thing. The leaders did not want to dirty their hands. It's like the church leader in Revelation chapter 3 verse 1, to whom the Lord said, say to the leader of the church in Sardis, I have something against you.

You have a name that you are alive, but you are actually dead. But there are some young brothers in your church in Sardis who have not defiled their garments. And that's how it was here in this part of the wall.

The young brothers among the Techoites, they did the repairs, but the older brothers were too lazy to dirty their hands and do anything. They sat there as big bosses in their houses and they did not bring their neck, it says, to the work. Maybe they did a little bit for namesake, but they came under the curse

described in Jeremiah 48.

I want you to notice a curse in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 48. In the King James Version, it reads like this, Cursed is the one who does the work of the Lord negligently, lazily, with deceit. Cursed is the one who does the Lord's work with deceit.

There are a lot of full-time workers in the world today who come under that curse because they are doing the Lord's work negligently and with deceit. It's a very important verse, Jeremiah 48, verse 10. There's a curse also there in the one who restrains the sword from blood when it comes to fighting the flesh.

But that's how it was with the leaders of the Tikoites, that they did not wholeheartedly cooperate with the work that the others were doing. And then we move on to verse 6, Jeremiah 3, 6. It says about some who repaired the old gate, that was another of the gates there. And verse 7, next to them, Meletiah the Gibeonite, and Jeron the Meronite, the men of Gibeon.

You remember, the Gibeonites were the people who were actually Canaanites, but in Joshua chapter 9 you read that they came with old garments and deceived Joshua, and Joshua made a covenant with them, and Joshua said, all right, we won't kill you. And later on, when he discovered that he was cheated, God said, no, you've got to keep your word now, you can't kill them. And those Gibeonites, we find later on that they have come to the place where they can cooperate in building the walls of Jerusalem.

It's a picture of some who are lost and becoming first in God's work, when some of the leaders of the Tikoites, who were the Jews, were disregarded by God and came under the curse. It's wonderful to see a Gibeonite there who started out as a slave, now a co-worker in building the wall, and he also made repairs for the official seat of the governor beyond the river. Next to him, verse 8, was one of the goldsmiths.

It's wonderful to see these rich businessmen humbling themselves and dirtying their hands and working along with the Gibeonites. Just imagine, next to this Gibeonite who was a slave, you have this goldsmith, this rich businessman next to the slave, and he didn't shift his seat to some other part of the wall in order so that he doesn't get too close fellowship with the slave. It's wonderful in the body of Christ that the slaves, the Gibeonites, can be next to the rich goldsmiths.

And also to the perfumers, these were the wealthy businessmen, verse 8, it's wonderful how God puts these Gibeonites and these rich businessmen next to each other so that they can each work on their own salvation and die to their personal likes and dislikes and build the body of Christ. And next to him, Hanani, one of the perfumers, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the broad wall. And then we read about one of the rulers, verse 9, next to them, Rephi, the son of Hor, the ruler or official means the mayor or ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he also made repairs.

The secular rulers, we saw the religious rulers in verse 1, here we find the secular rulers also, great big shots, cabinet ministers, coming down and dirtying their hands and coming and sitting down with all the others and doing the repairs. And next to them, we read in verse 10, Jediah made repairs opposite his own house, and that has a spiritual meaning, that we need to build a wall in our own house as well, keeping the commandments of Jesus and building the walls of separation high, not only in the church, but in our own home as well, so that even in our own home, worldly influences are not permitted inside, whether through magazine or music or gossip or worldly people coming and wanting to sit and waste our time or any such thing, that the walls are built high, even in our own home. And then we read in verse 11, Malkijah the son of Harim and Hashim the son of Pehat Moab repaired another section and the furnace

tower, you can imagine what the temperature must have been over there, and how these people who were working near the furnace would certainly would have liked to have a transfer to another part of the wall or found, felt the leading from God, as people say, to move over to a more comfortable part of the world to live in, to do God's work.

No, God had placed them near the furnace, and whatever inconvenience the furnace caused them, they continued to stick to their job. There was no question of going away to some other place or sitting there and comparing their lot next to the furnace with some other person's lot in a more easier part of the wall. All those who compare themselves with each other are spiritual idiots, and it's amazing how many spiritual idiots the devil succeeds in producing among Christians, people who, even though they hear about comparing themselves with each other, they continue to compare themselves with each other and always think, here I am suffering near the furnace, and that brother in the other place seems to have an easy time, and here I am struggling all the time.

Well, I'm sure these people couldn't have done much of the work if they were complaining about the heat of the furnace. Verse 12, it says, And next to him Shalem, the son of Halahesh, another ruler of the half district of Jerusalem, made repairs, and he was really a wholehearted brother. He got even his daughters to work along with him.

He didn't think that the daughters of the rulers should just sit in front of the mirror all the whole day and beautify themselves. He said, Get your hands dirty, come, and when everybody else is doing a job, you better come and help too. And that teaches us that in the building of Jerusalem, there is a part for the sisters, and it's very important for the sisters to understand that God has a part for you to play in teaching other people to keep the commandments of Jesus, in being wholehearted in teaching others to keep the commandments of Jesus.

There are certain things we read in Titus chapter 2 that only an older sister can teach a younger sister. Many things concerning the home life, how to be a spiritual, godly sister at home, can be taught to a young sister only by an older sister who has already acquired that meek and quiet spirit, and knows how to love her husband, submit to her husband, love her children, and keep her home in an orderly way for the glory of God. So there is a place for the sisters, and it cannot be neglected.

No, it is not just the work of the brothers. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, and the Bible says, Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. And we need to see a revival of that, dear sisters.

The Spirit of God is poured out upon men and women, and you have a part to prophesy, to encourage others, even in the meetings in the church, so that the walls of Jerusalem can be built. Don't let your part be ignored, or left out, your part of the wall. There is a part for sisters in the walls of Jerusalem.

Be wholehearted. It's a small part, there are many, not many sisters mentioned in this chapter, but there are a few. There is a small part of the wall for sisters, and make sure that you do it.

Don't fall over the other cliff, where we sit and do nothing. So that's just by way of noticing something there in verse 12. Now we come to verse 13, it says here about those who repent, the valley gate, that's another gate, and they built and hung its doors, and then verse 14, we come to the dung gate that I spoke of, and that must have been a pretty awful experience too, to work next to the gate where the dung is carried out all the time, the gate through which the scavengers went out, and you can imagine the difficulty people had working near that gate, and repairing that gate, and how they would have compared themselves with

somebody else if they could have, but they didn't.

It says the ruler repaired the dung gate. That's wonderful. Or the refuse gate, the gate of rubbish, the gate through which the rubbish is taken out of Jerusalem.

You've heard us speaking about the rubbish in the church, and the reason we speak about rubbish in the church is because Jerusalem has got a rubbish gate, which must be used, it must not be broken down, that rubbish gate has to be used, and you know what the rubbish is? All that is big and great in the eyes of men. Luke 16, 15, all that is big and great in the eyes of men is an abomination in God's eyes, is like dung in God's eyes. It's to be covered up, thrown out, it's like human dung, fit for nothing, to be thrown out.

Human pomp and greatness being brought into the church, we must keep the refuse gate repaired and ready to throw it all out, and people who want to get offended because of that are welcome to go out along with the garbage through the refuse gate, but those who are willing to get rid from their lives of all this seeking honour from people because of something great that they have in their lives, which is great in the eyes of men, if we are willing to die to all that, then we have a place in building Jerusalem. So I believe that that refuse gate is a very important gate, and it's wonderful when a ruler can humble himself to build a dung gate and repair it. He built it and hung its doors with its bars.

Then we read in verse 15, Shalem, the son of the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the fountain gate. I just want to say one thing. We've spoken about certain things in the assembly that when we come to the church, those who are like rulers, those who are big shots in the assembly, those who think that they are from a high family, need to be told to repair the refuse gate, need to be told, for example, to sweep the floor and clean the toilets, and if they are too big for that, they cannot be a part of the body of Christ.

God has to bring everybody down to the same level, and that's part of the lesson we learned there in the ruler cleaning up the dung gate and repairing it. It would be the equivalent of cleaning up the toilets in the assembly today, the big shots, the cabinet ministers, and the people who feel they are important in the world. When they come there, we can build the body of Christ, and we have to preserve the church in that way that we don't allow any person to think too much of himself in the body of Christ.

They must all go out of the refuse gate, all that bigness. We read in verse 15 about the repair of the fountain gate. Next to the dung gate is the fountain gate, and that's the principle in our life, that when we clear out the garbage, then we find the fountain of the Holy Spirit as greater freedom in our life.

He built it, covered it, and so on. In verse 16, God repairs 18, their brothers 19, another ruler, and verse 20. All those verses from verse 15 to 20, we read of various people, rulers and others, working, dirtying their hands.

Then we see something very interesting in verse 20. Remember, this is the Holy Spirit recording what each person did. Brother so-and-so, he did this.

And brother so-and-so, he did this. And sister so-and-so, in all the years that she was in the assembly, she did this. And so-and-so, one of the elder brothers, he just sat there and did nothing.

And that's also there. And then we see about one brother here, in verse 20. Brother Baruch, he was a wholehearted brother.

He zealously repaired another section. Of course, all the others also repaired, but there was a difference in brother Baruch. He went about it really wholeheartedly.

He was radical, and the Holy Spirit takes notice of that, that in this list of all these people who were repairing the walls, he takes notice of the fact that one brother was really radical and wholehearted. Wonderful. And it is like that in the final day, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we'll find that the Holy Spirit has faithfully recorded how we did the work of the Lord on the earth, how we lived for God on the earth.

And there will be a few, there's only one in this list, there will be a few, I trust, about whom the Holy Spirit can say, that brother, he was really radical and wholehearted in his private life, and wholehearted about keeping the commandments, and teaching others to keep the commandments. Wonderful example. And we read here, he built up to the house of Elisha, the high priest.

Here's another good thing we see, verse 21. After him, Merimoth, the son of Uriah, the son of Hechoz, repaired another section from the doorway of Elisha's house to as far as the end of his house. This is wonderful, when we can be so unselfish that we can go and repair the wall of somebody else's house.

You see, Jerusalem had their houses built on the walls. And here was a brother who was, who didn't think just of himself, but he thought of how he could help in that brother's house over there, and he carried out repairs beside that other person's house. I tell you, that requires quite a degree of unselfishness.

The Bible says, let not every man seek his own, but every man another's good. And here was a brother who took that, and the Holy Spirit took note of that, that that brother, brother so-and-so, was so concerned about that other brother's family, and he did something for them. And he was so concerned about that other brother's family, and he did something for them, to build the walls there.

And the Holy Spirit takes note of that. And of course, we see here that the house that was repaired was the house of Eliashib, the high priest. And we know that, we read about him in verse 1. A wonderful man, that he was busy doing God's work in one particular place, and God took care of the fact that his own house was repaired by somebody else.

That's a wonderful spirit in the body of Christ, that when one man was doing God's work in one place, somebody else took care of his family, and built up the walls in his house. Wonderful. And if we can build a body of Christ like this, it will really be an example in an evil world.

And then we see here, in verse 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, various people who repaired their houses. In verse 27, you see something here. The Ticoites repaired another section.

Now we read about these Ticoites in verse 5, that these were the people whose elder brothers didn't do much work, and the young brothers did the work. But these young brothers were so zealous that they finished the repair in one section, and moved over to another section where there was a gap in the wall. And from verse 5, we see in verse 27, they went and repaired another section.

Wonderful. When God can find people who are willing to make up for the failures of other brothers, and fill up the gaps, not sit back and complain that brother so-and-so is not doing his job, you go and do it. That's a good example we get from those Ticoites.

And they went there and finished that part of the wall. Then we read about the horse gate, where the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. And then after them, Zedok carried out repairs in front of his house.

And then verse 30, a man who carried out repairs in front of his own quarters. And then again, one of the rich businessmen, verse 31, who carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants. Wonderful, when the businessmen can repair the house of the servants.

That's really something that we can see in an expression of the body of Christ. And then finally, we reach back to the sheep gate, from the cross to the cross, as we said. A total body ministry.

Priests, businessmen, servants, Gibeonites, young brothers, older brothers, and some brothers are lazy, somebody else does it, and the Holy Spirit keeping a fateful record of who has done it zealously, who did one part and went and did another part after finishing that, who took care of somebody else's house, and who did this, that and the other, in the various aspects of building God's work on earth. So there is a beautiful picture there of how it must be in our midst when we seek to build the body of Christ today, and build the walls, keeping the commandments of Jesus, and erecting the wall for security and for separation. Now we come to chapter four, and here we read about the enemies.

These enemies are the ancestors of the Samaritans. We considered that in an earlier study, that when the king of Assyria captured the Israelites, he brought some of the Assyrian people and planted them in Samaria, and they got married to the Israelites, women and all that, and there was a mixture there, and there grew up a generation of people about whom it says in 2 Kings 17, we studied this earlier, but I'll just show you one verse that describes these Samaritans. In 2 Kings 17 it says, in verse 33, they feared the Lord and served their own gods.

It's an amazing statement. They feared the Lord and served their own gods. That means they had a form of godliness, but they lived for themselves, they loved money, they loved themselves, they didn't hate sin, they had a form of godliness.

And these are the people who opposed the work, the people who were planted by the king of Assyria, as described, you can take time to read it, in 2 Kings 17, verse 24 to 33, and we saw that in an earlier study. And these were the people from whom Sanballat descended, Sanballat and Tobai and Gishim. And these are the people who are always disturbed when we preach about obedience.

They say that's not the main thing. They say the main thing is evangelism. But the Bible teaches that we are to teach people to obey all the commandments of Jesus, and when we teach people to obey all the commandments of Jesus, the wall becomes very high, and carnal Christians are disturbed.

It says when he heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry, and when the enemy seeks to oppose us, we find in this chapter that there are four ways by which he sought to hinder God's work. First of all was by mocking, verse 1. By making fun. Oh, you fellows think you're very holy, is it? You think you're going to be very spiritual, you're going to be perfect, is it? You think you're like Jesus and nobody else is going to heaven.

And mock people and try to despise them. That is the first step. And what we see around us and hear people saying to us, it's not new, if you read the book of Nehemiah, it's all there, people did it, the ancestors of these people were there to do it in those days, and their descendants are alive today to do it

today as well.

They mocked. They were angry because we preach obedience to all the commandments. And because of this they mock.

And he spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria, a lot of rich people here who are offended by the message of obedience, and what are these feeble Jews doing? Oh, there's a bunch of people, just a few of them gathered together there claiming to be the body of Christ. Feeble. Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish it in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble, even the burned ones? And Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said even what they're building, if a fox should jump on it, he'd break their stone wall down.

He said, this is not going to produce anything. It's not going to last. It's not going to last at all.

This work will accomplish nothing. Yeah, there are people like that, despising even today. What did Nehemiah do? He did not try to justify himself or answer them.

He just ignored them and he said, O Lord, I commit the matter to you. Here, O our God, how we are despised. It's a good thing for us to have reproach.

It is through reproach that we are protected. And it is under a covering of reproach that we are to build this wall. Never forget that.

That's the number one weapon of the enemy, and God allows it to exist. And Nehemiah was under the old covenant, so he could not pray like we pray under the new covenant, to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us and bless them that curse us. So we must keep that in mind when he prays here, return their reproach on their heads, give them up for plunder in a land of captivity, do not forgive their iniquity, let not their sin be blotted out for they have demoralized the builders.

Well, that was old covenant praying. We keep that in mind. So we built the wall.

The principle is he committed the matter to God. And so we built the wall. How did we build the wall? Under this covering of reproach and committing the matter to God.

And the whole wall, listen to this wonderful phrase, was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. There was a zeal there. There was a fantastic zeal in the people's hearts to do God's work in spite of this opposition and reproach.

And very soon the wall came up to half the height. They had now preached half of all the commandments of Jesus. And there are some people who stopped there.

You know, I spoke about these half-way homes. Here's what I mean. People who start out very zealously.

Yeah, we've got to forsake everything, brother. We've got to face reproach and ridicule and persecution and everything. But then after some time, after they've built, you know, they've come to forgiveness of sins and water baptism and baptism in the Holy Spirit, they've come sort of half-way, and then they don't want any more.

They don't want to go so far like some of these peculiar assemblies do. We'd like to stop here. This is a convenient height.

It'll protect us. And they live there in insecurity and without separation. And after a little while the world has broken down even that half-wall and come right in.

That's exactly what happens to half-way home assemblies. And so we see here that when this wall was built half-way, up till that point the reproach didn't bother them. And then we find a second tactic of the enemy.

In verse seven and eight, it came about when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashtodites, it's amazing how the number of people who oppose God's work begins to increase. The more people hear about it, they, if they could, they would have written tracts against Nehemiah and his workers and quoted scripture to say that this was all heresy which these people were preaching and everything else. And when they heard that the repair of the walls went on and the breachers began to be closed, they were angry.

Why were they angry? That God's will was being done. And they conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. This is the second weapon of the enemy.

First is reproach. And then second, when that doesn't work, active opposition, persecution. First reproach and then persecution of some form or the other to cause a disturbance in God's work.

But what did Nehemiah do? He didn't get worried. It says, we just prayed to our God. Wonderful example.

And because of them, we set up a guard against them day and night. Or as the King James Version says, we set up a watch against them day and night. And there you have that phrase in this verse, watch and pray.

They watched against the enemies and they prayed. And Jesus said that in Matthew 26, watch and pray that you do not fall in the moment of temptation. Watch against the enemy and don't be afraid of him, pray to God.

That's what Nehemiah did. They watched and they prayed. That's how they overcame.

Now, those are the two ways by which the devil seeks to oppose God's work from outside. Very important to keep it in mind. By reproach and by persecution.

And the answer to both of them is to ignore it and to trust in God. And to pray for those who persecute us, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us. And to commit our cause to God and say, Lord, this is your work, not ours.

You take care of it. God takes care of it. And now we read about two ways in which the devil sought to bring confusion in God's work from inside.

And that's more dangerous. What we saw was the two ways in which the devil sought to bring difficulties from the outside. Now, two ways in which the devil sought to hinder God's work from the inside.

First of all, by murmuring. In Judah it was said, and this is translated very beautifully in the Good News Bible. In the Good News Bible it says, they used to sing a song in Judah.

You know what the song was? The strength of the burden-bearers is failing, yet there is much rubbish, and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall. You know what the title of that song is? The Old Song.

You know what the opposite of that is? The New Song, where we give thanks for everything, and we do not grumble or murmur or complain.

And it's a very sad day in the church or in a home, when in addition to the reproach and the persecution from the outside, the devil has also managed to come inside and get people to murmur and complain about something or the other. The Bible says in Philippians 2.14, do all things without murmuring or complaining. That's the Old Song.

The New Song is, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Remember, there are only 144,000 who have learned that New Song on the earth. I tell you, it's a small number who are 100% freed from all grumbling and complaining, even in their spirit.

It's not just with our tongue that we don't grumble or complain, but in the spirit there is no grumbling. You see, irritation with somebody is a form of grumbling in my spirit. I am upset with the way that person does certain things.

That is a form of grumbling, even if I don't open my mouth. So, here was that Old Song. It's there in the Old Testament too.

The people who learned this Old Song, there's too much rubbish. What does that mean? We saw what the rubbish meant. The rubbish means that which is big and great in the eyes of men.

And there's a lot of it in Christianity which has to be thrown out through the dung gate. And some people don't want it all to be thrown out. These other people here, they say, we have to have a little respectability.

After all, we've got to maintain something. We can't go right down to that level. And so they have built the wall halfway.

They don't want to throw out any more rubbish. They want to keep in the church something which is big and great in the eyes of men to impress the world. And they sing the Old Song.

They are murmuring. And the rubbish could also symbolize all the traditions that are found in Christianity which are not taught in God's Word, like the celebration of Christmas and Easter. A lot of things like that.

We have to do it after all. We can't just act as though we are heathens, not celebrating Christmas, even though the Word of God doesn't say one word about it. They like to preserve some of this rubbish.

You don't want to throw it all out of the dung gate. I tell you, if you are wholehearted and you want to be in that 144,000, there's a lot of garbage that will have to go out from the dung gate from our past life. All the accumulated garbage of the traditions of men.

That's really something. Wholehearted obedience to God's Word. Wholehearted obedience to God's Word.

Think of that. Sisters getting rid of all their ornaments and decorating themselves in fancy ways. That's really something.

If you begin to be wholehearted in that, think of throwing all the ornaments out of the rubbish gate. To say that's something big and great in the eyes of men. We don't want that in the church.

We don't want human greatness. No, there are a lot of things there. And there we can begin to be compromisers in a halfway home with a wall built halfway and say there's too much rubbish.

We can't throw it all out. So that's how the enemy came in from inside. And then the enemy said, they will not know or see until we come among them, kill them, put a stop to the work.

Here is the persecution becoming intense. And now a second weapon by which the devil comes within. And that is discouragement and fear.

Discouragement and fear. And the Jews who lived near these enemies came and told us ten times, they will come against us from every place. They'll kill us.

We better stop this work here. We shouldn't proceed. Let's leave it here.

Let's not go on. Discouragement and fear. And so we see the devil has two weapons to oppose us from the outside, reproach and persecution.

And two weapons on the inside, that is murmuring dissatisfaction with something in the house, dissatisfaction with something in the assembly, talking about it, gossiping about it, instead of humbling oneself and praying about it. And the other is fear and discouragement, bringing gloom and depression to everybody one speaks to. It's a weapon of the enemy.

Ten times they kept on saying, be careful brother, be careful. Then Nehemiah, of course, wasn't scared. He says, I stationed men in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the exposed places, verse 13, and I stationed people and their families with swords, spears and bows.

And this is what he said, when I saw their fear, discouragement and fear go together, when I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people. And you know what he told them? I could paraphrase his words. If you fear God, you need fear no one else.

That's what he told them. He knew what Isaiah had said in Isaiah chapter 8, verse 12 and 13. Nehemiah was a student of scripture.

If you fear God, you need fear no one else, and nothing else. He said, don't be afraid of them. Don't fear their fear, like Isaiah said.

Fear the Lord, who is great and awesome. It's interesting that Nehemiah said the same words that Isaiah said. If you fear God, you need fear no one else.

You need fear no circumstance. There is no situation, no circumstance that need ever discourage you, that need ever bring fear into your heart, brothers and sisters, if you fear God. Remember Him, the great and awesome and sovereign God, and fight.

Fight these evil spirits that are seeking to bring you down. Fight them, resist them. Fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.

And it says here, and it happened. When our enemies heard that it was known to us that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. It's wonderful how God frustrates the plans of the enemy.

The entire Bible, we can say, is a description of how God frustrates Satan's plan. God frustrates Satan's plan. Right from Genesis 3, Satan had a plan, God frustrated it.

Right up to Revelation. It's one continuous description of how God frustrates Satan's plans. He turns the tables on Satan.

And it is written for our encouragement that every single thing that Satan and his host of evil spirits and all his agents on the earth, all the enemies, seek to do against us and God's work, God is committed to frustrate it. It's wonderful to have God on our side, God before us. Who can be against us? And the enemies saw it.

They knew that we were not ignorant of their schemes. He says the enemies knew that we heard, that we knew what they were going to do. Paul says that.

We are not ignorant of Satan's schemes. And God frustrates their plans. And we carried on building the wall.

And we see here, these people building the wall, they were not only servants, they were also soldiers. Half of my servants carried on the work, verse 16, half of them held spears. It says in verse 17, they had an instrument to do the work in one hand and a weapon in the other hand.

And each builder had a sword and his instrument for building. And that also teaches what our calling is in the body of Christ. We are called to be servants and soldiers.

The New Testament says we are to serve, do dirty jobs, to build the body of Christ. At the same time we've got to have our weapons, described in Ephesians 6, 12 onwards, the weapons of our warfare, to stand against the enemy. How did these people build? One eye on the enemy, one eye on the work.

And that's how it must be in our life. Watching against the enemy and committed to God's work. Watching against the enemy, committed to God's work.

Soldiers and servants. That's how it was, they wholeheartedly served the Lord. Verse 19 and 20, I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, the work is great and extensive.

And we are separated on the wall, far from one another. But at whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.

What he was saying is, see the wall is so big, we're all scattered all over. And the enemy may suddenly come from one side. And don't, when you see, and you may not see over that end of the wall that the enemy is attacking a few brothers here, this part of the wall.

But, I've got a trumpeter, and the trumpeter will blow the trumpet, and when you hear that, I'll call you to this particular section of the wall where the enemy is attacking a few brothers. Rally there, and stand by those brothers, and drive the enemy out. You know what the spiritual application of that is.

That sometimes you find that the enemy is particularly attacking one family, or a few brothers. What are the rest of the brothers in the church going to do? What are the rest of the brothers in the church going to do? Are they going to stand by them? And say, we're going to pray for that family. They're going through a rough time now, and Satan's probably trying to hamper them in so many ways.

We want to stand by them. We want to rally together, because this is the place where the devil's attacking now. We're sort of a bit relaxed at the moment.

Another time they may have to come and help us, but right now we've got to go and help them. The enemy's come there. We've got to hear the voice of the trumpet.

Calling us to support our brothers, particularly those brothers who are going through a rough time at this particular time. Those brothers and sisters. That shows whether we have a sense of responsibility, or we sit back and say, oh well, it's going gloriously with us.

Praise the Lord, it's wonderful with us. Well, that brother probably needs to be more wholehearted. That's why the enemy's attacking him.

No, sir. That's not the reason, brother. That's just an opportunity for us to stand together as the body of Christ, and oppose the enemy, and drive him out in that particular place.

If a man sees his brother sin a sin, what should he do? If the enemy's sort of broken down the wall in a brother's house, what should you do? Rally there. Don't criticize him and say, what have you been doing there? No, rally around him, pray for him, build up that wall, stand by him, and bring him through. That's our calling.

And I tell you, there are very, very few brothers and sisters who have such a sense of responsibility for one another. Each person will say, am I my brother's keeper? They are followers of Cain. God says, you are your brother's keeper.

We have to keep one another. That's what we see here. And thus, and then God will fight for us, verse 20.

Certainly he'll fight for us when we are willing to preserve the unity of the spirit, like that, in a concern for one another. And thus we carried on the work. It's wonderful if we can carry on the work like that, thus.

That word, so, comes about twenty times in the book of Nehemiah. So, like this, like this, like this, we carried on the work. With half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared, see their wholeheartedness in working right from early morning till late in the evening.

And at that time I said to the people, let each man, with his servant, spend the night within Jerusalem. Our place of security is within the church. Don't drift away from there, so that there may be a God for us by night and a laborer by day.

So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes. Each took his weapon, even to the water. Just think how wholehearted they were, that in the time of building the wall, they didn't even take time to have a bath.

See, there are some people who are so clean that they even neglect God's work, because they must have their bath, you see. But Nehemiah realized that God's work was more important than any earthly convenience. It doesn't matter if I don't have a bath for a few days, if God's work demands it.

I tell you, you really got to find a few brothers like that who are wholehearted and radical, where no earthly convenience is as important as doing God's work. Building the wall, keeping the commandments, and teaching others to keep the commandments is the most important thing, standing against the enemy, and glorifying God in the church. Brothers and sisters, there is an example for us in the Old Testament, in

Nehemiah and those band of brothers and sisters who stood together, who could build that wall and glorify God in their day.

And now they have handed over the baton in this really race to us, who live in this last generation, so that we can do the same thing.

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