

## HOW WAS THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED?

Scripture: Neh. 2:1-8

"So the wall was finished." Nehemiah 6:15a.

4:6

6:15-16

*Our Text records the fact of the*

~~It has been said that a lost word in the pulpit of today is the word "how". It is found however, in the subject before us, and the sermon which is to follow answers the question, How was the wall finished? Our text records the fact of the completion of a historic task, the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Not only is this important fact here recorded, but the first half of the book of Nehemiah tells us how it was done. It was accomplished thru prayer, thru God's man as a leader, and thru a people who had a mind to work,-- God, God's man, and God's people.~~

### 1. Prayer.

The book of Nehemiah opens with a touching scene in the palace of the Persian king in the city of Shushan. Nehemiah, one of the children of the captivity, and cup-bearer to the king, had just received thru his brother the heartbreaking news concerning the great affliction and reproach of his home people in Jerusalem, and concerning Jerusalem that the wall had been broken down and the gates thereof burned with fire. Nehemiah, weeping and mourning soon turned unto fasting and praying. In his supplication which superceded his lamentation we see the groundwork being laid for the building of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was not only moved with compassion for his people in their affliction, but was moved to a contemplation of God. In his recorded invocation is set forth a wonderful conception of God. He is the God of heaven, a name used by Cyrus, Arius, and Artaxerxes with reference to Deity, also a name found in Jonah and Daniel. He is Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God. He is the God of justice, and the God of mercy. Nehemiah contemplates the majesty, the faithfulness, and the compassion of God. Then follows a deep confession of sin, confession being so characteristic of the prayers of the period of the exile by the captives who had experienced so much chastisement. Then he pleads God's promises to the penitent, recalling the great redemption from Egypt, and closing with his particular petition presented.

Subsequent prayers of Nehemiah are recorded. A number of them are very brief, ejaculatory, offered up at times of special need. He evidently lived in close communion with God. Being human all his prayers are not perfect. One or more of his prayers may be called imprecatory (see 4:4) showing "his angry jealousy for the honor of a jealous God." Again he joins in united prayer with his brethren. "But we made our prayer unto our God," and set a watch against them day and night." Thus they connected their prayers with watchfulness. It was in Gethsemane that Jesus said to his disciples, "Watch and pray". Read again the story of the building of the wall, and observe how that prayer is not only the ground work but also the very warp and woof of the whole enterprise. "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city the watchman watcheth but in vain."

### 2. God's Man as Leader.

*Longer*  
Take a look at Nehemiah, God's man who was used to lead in the building program in Jerusalem. As has already been seen, he was fundamentally a man of prayer, and so may indeed be called God's man. He was a Jewish captive. He was cupbearer to the Persian king. He was governor of Jerusalem. He was reformer of Israel. He was first on the list of the covenanters of his time. Look at him a little more closely and you will see him as Christ-like, courageous, cautious, challenging, conscious of the enemy, and not compromising. He was Christ-like in that he was moved with compassion for his distressed people, and was moved to prayer for their welfare. He was courageous in making a large and daring request of a heathen king. His definite request of this king was "that he might build the wall of Jerusalem."

When you and I approach the King of kings <sup>in prayer</sup> we do well, to remember the verse of the hymn which says,  
"Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring,  
For his grace and power are such; None can ever ask too much."

When Nehemiah's request was granted he immediately recognized that it was according to the good hand of God upon him. He also recognized that the purpose of this request was not to seek great things for himself, but to "seek the welfare of the children of Israel," and that God had put it into his heart to do this for Jerusalem.

This Christ-like, courageous man was also a man of caution. He was cautious in his request for a safe conduct to Jerusalem. He believed in having authorized passports. He had the religion of common sense. Again he was cautious in his famous midnight ride over the city of Jerusalem in order to get the needed advance information without the knowledge of the enemy. In his call of the people to the task he was a challenge and an inspiration to them. <sup>himself</sup> He included himself in the exhortation—"Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem." For their encouragement he told them "of the hand of my God which was good to me, and also of the king's words." The very spirit of this challenging leader was an inspiration to the people to arise and to build, and to strengthen their hands for the work. It has been said that "today, as in the time of Nehemiah, the supreme need is inspiration." This inspiration comes thru men who are inspired of God for a mighty task.

Nehemiah was a man ever conscious of the enemy, and he governed himself accordingly. He was awake to the lurking dangers. He knew that Sanballat and his party were grieved at the plans for rebuilding the wall, that they mocked the enterprise, and then conspired definitely against Israel. <sup>that day</sup> In answer to the enemy of God's people Nehemiah stated the source of his confidence—"The God of heaven, he will prosper us". He declared the determination of the Jews to arise and build, and he flatly denied the enemy's claim to a part in Jerusalem. "In the reply of Nehemiah we hear the Church refusing to ~~have~~ bend to the will of the world, because <sup>the world</sup> has no right to trespass on her territory." (Adeney) There was no place in Nehemiah's building program for peaceful coexistence with Satan.

He without a doubt believed in the use of arms when necessary, as does our own Westminster Confession of Faith. He used strategy against the enemy. He encouraged the leaders and the rest of the people not to be afraid, but to fight. "Be not ye afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters; your wives and your houses—our God will fight for us."

Courageous also was Nehemiah in dealing with the enemy within the ranks of Israel. He courageously denounced the whole practice of usury, having in mind the particular situation of cruel usury among the brethren, the Jews themselves, and he succeeded in the abolition of usury. In this connection he showed his own interest in the economic distress of his people, and his own unselfishness. He and his brethren did not eat the bread of the governor because the bondage was heavy upon the people. <sup>with him</sup> It was not only words, but also action. What an example for present day rulers!

Nehemiah had another quality so badly needed by our present day leadership. He did not compromise with the evil forces of his day. When he was repeatedly invited by the intriguing enemy to the conference table in the plains of Ono he definitely answered in the negative. No such confidence trick caught him, and his famous answer still holds good today, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Neither did their dangerous rumors for the sake of frightening him accomplish their purpose, nor did the snare of the false prophet catch him, strengthened as he was thru repeated ejaculatory prayer. How modern all this sounds! but where are the Nehemiahs of today? The New Testament church has something to say along these lines as under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the apostle John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but prove the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into

the world, Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already."

### 3. For the People had a Mind to Work.

"So the wall was finished"—How? Thru prayer, thru the leadership of God's man, and once more, "For the people had a mind to work". God, God's man, God's people. The apostle Paul said, "We are laborers together with God." Without strength thru prayer the leader was helpless. Without leadership the people would have been confused and conquered. Without the people with a mind to work the leader would be like a watch that lacks both hands, as useless when it goes as when it stands. The third part of this three-fold answer as to how the wall was finished is stated in the words of Ehemiah himself. "For the people had a mind to work." God used not only the leader, but also the rank and file of the people who were such an important part of the whole enterprise. God could have done it all without the help of a leader, or without the help of the people, but that is not His method. This truth is expressed in the poetic lines beginning, "God has no hands but our hands—" God uses qualified leaders, but He uses a great many more followers. Leadership must have workmanship. Ground forces are needed as well as generals, and a lot more of the ground forces.

The work of building the wall, as may be expected, had its special difficulties. There was constant danger of molestation by the enemy. There was discouragement on the part of Judah who said, "We are not able to build the wall." It just can't be done. There was delay because of the enemy. Then there was disgrace in the Jewish ranks, when the nobles of Tekoa just balked on walking. Their disgraceful epitaph is simply this, "But their nobles put not their necks to the work of the Lord."

On the other hand the work of the Lord went forward. It was a good work. "So they strengthened their hands for the good work." It was a well-organized work, right men in the right places. The detailed work was recognized and recorded. The high priests who evidently led off in the work sanctified it. Of one man it is simply recorded that he "earnestly" repaired another portion of the wall. That one word, "earnestly" makes a most honorable epitaph for Baruch the son of Zabbai. The work of those who simply stood on guard holding the spears and shields and bows and coats of mail is recorded as well as, or right along with, the servants who wrought in the work, this reminding us of the words of John Milton in his blindness, "They also serve who stand and wait."

When Ehemiah saw the completed wall he gave honor to whom honor was due. When he said "So we built the wall" I am sure he must have had in mind, God, God's man, and God's people, for from beginning to end he recognized the good hand of God in it all, even when he said the reason for the success was that the people had a mind to work. Again the apostle completes the idea when he says, "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."

When the heathen enemies saw that the wall of Jerusalem was finished even they recognized that God had done it (6:16) "For they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." Right now we are reminded that when the glorious matchless work of redemption was completed after Jesus had said "It is finished" and had yielded up his spirit, "the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were done, feared exceedingly saying, "Truly this was the Son of God." How was this supreme work accomplished? The word of the cross gives the answer. Our crucified and risen Savior and Lord said, "I will build my church." Do you have a mind to work in this building? Are you listed under the banner of the Cross?

Hymn: "The church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ our Lord"

"We have our redemption thru his blood, the forgiveness of our  
transgressions, according to the riches of his grace."