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Nehemiah—The Wall-Builder

by Harold L. Willmington

To tell the truth, he was a bit sore. First there had been that long trip across the desert. Then during the previous night he had ridden around the area. Unusual activity for a professional politician. Now, in the light of the rising sun, he could fully view the ruins. What he saw was not encouraging. Enemy soldiers and the ravages of time had utterly devastated the wall that had once stood tall and strong around the beloved city.

Dismounting somewhat stiffly from his horse, the rider entered a room filled with the men he had personally summoned. The rider was Nehemiah; the city, Jerusalem; the ruins, its walls; and the assembled men, key Jewish leaders. But what was the reason for all this? In the words of Nehemiah himself: "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."

On September 25, 445 B.C., thousands of grateful Jews stood by the newly rebuilt water gate in Jerusalem to hear the public reading of God's Word by Ezra the prophet. Among the multitude was Nehemiah, who doubtless stood with blistered hands and grateful heart. In just 52 days this man of faith had rebuilt the fallen walls of the beloved city! What a cause for celebration!

Nehemiah set an unselfish example for all the people (5:14-18). During his entire 12-year ministry as governor, he took no salary (5:14). In fact he paid for the food consumed by 150 of his helpers (5:17-18) and loaned money without interest to needy Jews (5:10). He worked on the wall himself (5:16). Nehemiah displayed total confidence in God (4:14; 8:9-10). "And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (Neh. 4:14). "Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat,

and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (8:10).

He refused to compromise. "Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (2:20).

He prayed. "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (4:9). "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (6:9).

He contended for the faith. "And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the

work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me . . . So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing" (4:16-18,23).

He remained steadfast. "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, 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?" (6:3). ■



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