THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

"Be Not Afraid . . . Remember the Lord"

Nehemiah 4:11-23

Introduction

1. Nehemiah was a persistent optimist. This was not a matter of his flesh, but because he really knew the Lord God of Israel. One must be careful of those who get excited from natural stimuli. That is useless in the long run. Faith must forever rest on an omnipotent God!

2. Therefore, rubbish, discouragement, adversaries, and lots of worries notwithstanding, Nehemiah was all for getting on with building the walls of Jerusalem (cf. vv. 1-3, 7, 8, 11, 10, 12). Nehemiah's leadership never faltered. It was excellent. The people had a mind to work (v. 6). Nehemiah believed in prayer and watchfulness (v. 9) and action (v. 21a).

3. Consider, therefore, efforts of Nehemiah to do the will of God and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

1. HIS PREPARATION

a. By Resisting vv. 12, 13

With the reports of expectations of war and the intimidations (v. 12), Nehemiah decided to take no chances. He pulled all the workers off the wall and organized them into military contingents by families. Three verbs stand out in his resistance movement: "I set" (two times v. 13), "I looked" (v. 14) and "I rose up" (v. 14). Note this was a people movement of "their" families with "their" swords and "their" spears for close combat and "their" bows for long range fighting effective up to about 400 yards. Apparently, the families took up positions down behind the wall where the piles of rubble would not inhibit fighting (v. 13a).

b. By Building

There was no let up in the building project. Believing God had frustrated the plans of the enemy, the people "returned to their work" (v. 15). It was a "great and large" work (v. 19) and the people labored in it (v. 21). There is not a syllable to suggest defeat. Everything was on the move. Our day is one of apostasy, compromise, and diversity. The work of the Lord must be continued in strict accord with His will set forth in His Word. God give us a heart to do it.

2. HIS EXHORTATION

a. To Faith v. 14

This was Nehemiah's message to three specific groups. Each is introduced with a definite preposition ( ): nobles, rulers, rest of the people. His call to faith was two-sided:

1) Negative "Do not be afraid of them" i.e. the enemy (cf. v. 11). We have a similar New Testament admonition (Ro. 8:31-39; 2 Tim. 1:7).

2) Positive "Remember the Lord" He alone is "great" and "terrible." The latter term points Him to be deserving of reverence for He is holy. What a word of encouragement at a critical moment. Faith looks to God alone!

b. To Fight v. 14

There is no doubt about the matter. War meant to eat or devour the enemy (so Hebrew verb lechem cf. v. 20). One preposition ( ) covers the call to arms for "your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." There was just cause to fight! Note the arms employed (v. 16).

c. To Hear v. 20

While each family assumed his responsibility in the project, there was no thought of each going his own way. Nehemiah had a trumpeter who stood by him (v. 18). When he sounded the trumpet (shofar), then to that place the people would "resort" (gather together, chabats). Clearly there was a unified command and the people responded accordingly.

d. To Lodge v. 22

Since many Jews lived outside the city of Jerusalem and apparently returned to their villages at night, Nehemiah ordered all workers to remain in the city. By doing this, they would be personally protected, they could provide for the city's defense at night, and not lose work hours during the day. The work hours, moreover, were "from the rising of the morning" (break of day) "till the stars appeared" (v. 21).

3. HIS CONSTRUCTION

a. Done Unitedly

Judah had complained and confessed that "we are not able to build the wall" (v. 10). Apparently, there was a change of heart and "the rulers were behind all the house of Judah" (v. 16). The nation had closed rank so that the record is "that we returned all of us to the wall" (v. 15) "and so builded" (v. 18).

b. Done Individually

A group is only as strong as the composite of individuals. The text is clear that "every one" returned unto his work (v. 15.

4. HIS DEDICATION

No suggestion is given about surrender to the enemy. The text gives evidence of full surrender to the purpose of God. Many "wrought in the work" (v. 16, 17) and "labored in the work" (v. 21). All joined hands -- "brethren, servants, men of the guard" (v. 23). All "followed" Nehemiah. No one relaxed except for necessary personal needs (v. 23).

Conclusion

God had brought the counsel of the enemy to naught (v. 15 Hebrew yafer = to break in pieces). No wonder Nehemiah said "our God shall fight for us" (v. 20). The triumph was actually the Lord's! Let us learn from the example of Nehemiah that the will of God involves preparation on our part, intention to remember the Lord, and unbending corporate and individual dedication. In with and under all of these personal matters must be the confidence that the battle is not ours, but the Lord's! Amen.