THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

"Prayer and Rubbish"

Nehemiah 4:9-12

Review

1. The magnificent work of the Spirit of God among the people has been remarkably demonstrated (3:1-32). Before the work on the walls was completed, opposition to the project surfaced. This was not new (cf. 2:10, 14), but now it is exacerbated. It is a hallmark of the enemy to either stop the work of God or hinder its success (v. 7, 8). Count on it: the enemy of God's work never stops.

2. As recorded, the opposition was wrathful (v. 1), scornful (v. 1), questionable (vv. 2, 3), and powerful (vv. 1, 3, 7). The dedication of the nation, however, was equally evident through an imprecatory prayer (vv. 4, 5) and concentration of effort (v. 6).

3. Make no mistake, no nation demonstrated commitment to their original intent before the Lord (2:17-20). Consider these remarkable statements:

a. People had a mind to work (v. 6)

The word for "mind" (KJV) is "heart" (Heb). In this context the noun exhibits the mode of thinking, the purpose and determination of the people. The implication is noted by the verb "to work." Without this sort of spirit, the goal never could be reached.

b. People prayed to "our" God v. 9

The hithpael form of the verb denotes a reflexive force. The people "themselves" prayed directly to their God (term for "powerful" God). There was concert of prayer as the first person plural ("we") suggests.

c. People established a watch v. 9

Interestingly, the hiphil form of the verb (causative) is used here. The people caused a watch or guard against the enemies (v. 7). This "watch" was day and night "from the very face" of the opposition. What a confrontation -- heart to work, prayer to God, and an established watch. That is a powerful resistance to opposition.

4. With this setup, what does the text of Scripture affirm? Look at this:

1. DISCOURAGEMENT v. 10

a. Who?

Here is the tribe of Judah saying something. It is surprising to have this special southern tribe speaking out about the rebuilding of the temple city (cf. 2:7). Discouragement from those upon whom Nehemiah should depend is sad. Even the best of God's servants get in the dumps of despair (cf. Elijah, 1 Kings 19:1-7).

b. What?

Two problems are listed: 1) The strength of the burden-bearers (cf. Isa. 53:4, 11) has become weak, faint. The thought is that they lost heart, hence weakness developed. 2). The rubbish had piled up. This is a reference to dust, dry earth. The accumulation was so much that it was difficult for the building project. Circumstances overweighed the situation and discouragement piled up like dirt.

c. Why?

Here is the nub of the matter. Using an emphatic personal pronoun, it is noted that: "we" cannot build the wall (cf. v. 6).

Note: Strengthless people and lots of rubbish blurred the vision of Judah. They voiced sour apples for Israel's urgent rebuilding project!

Rubbish-filled lives hinder spiritual building of believer's lives. It is attendant loss of strength which grinds much spiritual growth to a screeching halt. God help us to combat discouragement with a Spirit-controlled life and witness.

2. PRONOUNCEMENT v. 11

a. Who?

Here the adversaries are speaking again. The words of discouragement from Judah was from within; this is from without. These adversaries are those mentioned earlier (2:10, 19; 4:1, 3, 7). The enemy never gives up. His end will come eschatologically (Eph. 6:12; Rev. 12, 19).

b. What?

Two items are mentioned: 1) A sneak attack with the workmen worn down and discouraged. Now comes this whispering campaign about an imminent armed attack. Israel would neither know the attack nor see it. Since Nehemiah had Persian favor, the enemy was unsure how much they dared to do against him. 2) A brutal slaughter was imminent. Hence, the nation would suffer drastically before they knew what hit them. Remember, do not underestimate the enemy nor his intentions.

c. Why?

The work of God must stop (Heb.--sit!). "Work" is used of Levitical service (1 Chron. 9:13; 28:13, 20) and of a king's business (Dan. 8:27).

3. WORRIMENT v. 12

a. Who?

These are Jews who lived near the border and worked on the walls. They apparently joined in internal opposition like those of Judah. They caused fear to rise among the people. Friends turned to foes.

b. What?

All kinds of reports of doom were given. The ten times means again and again the word went out to return home from building. The adversaries were surrounding the community on all sides: Samaria (v. 2) on the north, Ammon on the east, Arabs on the south, and Philistines (Ashdodites) on the west. Defeat was certain. These were prophets of doom indeed.

Conclusion The dedication of Nehemiah and the people was met head on with both internal and external opposition. No real work with God will lack such opposition. It is for those involved in the Lord's work to be ready for the attacks and respond to them in the power of the Spirit (Eph. 6:20).