Nehemiah - Commentaries by L. Douglas Nicolet

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Editorial: Conflict and Courage

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

“It came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it” (Neh. 4:7-8).

Nehemiah’s day was indeed a time of trouble, rebuke and blasphemy (Isa. 37:3). His faith in and love for Jehovah and His people were often tested. He was “pressed out of measure, above strength,” so that he could have despaired of his life (2 Cor. 1:8).

Many Christians find it so today.

From the moment Nehemiah heard of the sad condition of the beloved people of God and Jerusalem, he set his heart on delivering them (Neh. 1). From that moment, he became a special target of ridicule, violence and the subtle deceit of the enemy.

Many Christians find similar opposition today.

Courage to Face the Enemy

The accounts given in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther of God’s sovereign mercy and grace in stirring up His people and preserving them in such dark times present a striking picture of the day in which we live.

It is a day of felt weakness, breakdown and ruin in the professing Christian testimony—a time when Satan is making unprecedented assaults to destroy the divine institutions of God—marriage, family and assembly. Indeed, all that is of God is under constant attack—by physical violence or by the more deceptive (but equally destructive) attacks of evil doctrines and worldly lifestyles.

Faith and courage are needed for those who, like Nehemiah, weep and mourn (Neh. 1:4) for the condition of God’s beloved people. Strengthening “the things which remain, that are ready to die” in loving faithfulness to God will certainly result in unrelenting, vicious onslaughts of the devil.

Nehemiah’s faith, moral courage and love caused him to make an almost unthinkable request of the Gentile king he served. But God honored his faith and the desires of his heart just as He will for those who seek in sacrificial love to serve Him today.

Recognizing the Enemy

When Sanballat and Tobiah’s mocking failed to hinder Nehemiah’s work, a larger force committed to violence and warfare gathered against him. Five enemies are specially mentioned in Nehemiah 4:7.

Sanballat was a Moabite, and Tobiah was an Ammonite. Both were related to Israel (see Gen. 19:37-38), though they are usually seen in conflict. They are excluded from entering the congregation of Israel until the tenth generation (that is, forever).

There are many today who profess to be brethren—they claim Christianity as their religion, but in reality are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” Whether real or professing, their ways turn the “grace of our God into lasciviousness,” thus destroying the separation we must have to protect our marriages, families and assemblies from their corrupting influences.

Arabians—Ishmael’s descendents—resulted from Abraham’s attempt to secure Jehovah’s promises through his own efforts, rather than waiting on the Lord in faith. How often we allow the flesh to war against our marriages, families and assemblies!

Next the Ammonites are mentioned. When King David (2 Sam. 10:14) sent messengers to show kindness to Hanun the Ammonite king, they were mocked and insulted by the unbelieving people.

Today there is a pervasive spirit in Christianity which mocks and ridicules the sovereign grace of God and those messengers who walk in His reverence and fear—derisively calling them legalists or fundamentalists. Along with this, a terrible spirit of irreverent lightness increasingly characterizes Christianity. Oh! be careful about allowing such a spirit in marriages, homes and assemblies!

The Ashdodites resided in a Philistine city. It was the place where the ark of God was kept (see 1 Sam. 5) after the Philistines had conquered Israel and taken it as spoil. In much earlier days, the Philistines contended with Abraham and Isaac for wells of water in the land of Canaan.

We must ever war against anything that robs our sources of spiritual refreshment and our enjoyment of the Lord’s presence individually and collectively.

Defending Against the Enemy

Faithful Nehemiah did not give in to the various attacks of the enemy, nor was he discouraged by the faithlessness of his own people. (Read Nehemiah 4.)

Those engaged in spiritual conflict will find Nehemiah’s actions in protecting against their attack most instructive. “I set in the lower places behind the wall in exposed places, I even set the people, according to their families, with their swords, their spears and their bows” (Neh. 4:13 JnD).

First, Nehemiah, realizing the critical importance of unity in Jerusalem's defence, placed families who were united together in their hearts.

"United we stand, divided we fall" has recently become a popular expression in the world. But do we Christians believe the divine truth that a "house divided against itself shall not stand" ? How will our marriages, homes and assemblies stand if we aren't united as one (families) against the enemy's attacks?

Nehemiah also made sure that those who defended Jerusalem had three weapons at their disposal: swords, spears and bows. We too must have these same three weapons to use in our spiritual battle.

The sword morally suggests the Word of God— "quick [living], and powerful"—always our defense against Satan, even as it was the Lord's (Matt. 4:1-11).

The spear morally suggests the power and discernment given by the Spirit of God to wage war against the enemy (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4).

The bow morally suggests the vital necessity of dependence on God expressed through prayer. How many spiritual battles have been won with the bow of prayer (James 5:16)—and how many more have been lost where that weapon was not used!

May we, in the spirit of Nehemiah, "strengthen [our] hands" and "rise up and build," ever remembering that our "God shall fight for us" (Neh. 2:18; 4:20).

"Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

Ed.

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