

Rebuilding The Walls Of Jerusalem

Introduction. The Old Testament is full of types, symbols, metaphors, and allegories of events and institutions of the New Testament (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Jerusalem is one of the historic and sacred cities of the world, and time has failed to dull the reverence for the city.

The Babylonian Captivity was the midnight of ancient Jewish history. Memories of the departed grandeur of their nation so filled their hearts that the captives wept by the waters of Babylon (Psalm 137:1). With the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, a new era was ushered in, for Cyrus decreed the rebuilding of the temple. The temple was eventually rebuilt but the walls were still unrepaired. The book of Nehemiah reveals the life story of a great patriot. This lesson will trace the events narrated in the book, and draw certain analogies of the church from it.

I. ***The Characteristics Of Nehemiah***

A. Nehemiah's vision.

1. In the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes (445 B.C.) grievous tidings from Jerusalem reached the royal winter residence at Shushan.
2. Overwhelmed by the sad tidings from Jerusalem, Nehemiah fasted and prayed to God to incline the king's heart to grant his desire to help his brethren back home.
3. Nehemiah obtained a leave of absence for a fixed time, with letters to the governors west of the Euphrates to aid him in his journey (Nehemiah 2:6-7).

B. Nehemiah's determination.

1. He challenged the leaders of the remnant to work with him (not for him) in repairing the walls. Nehemiah showed them the need, outlined the task, and assured them of God's blessing (Nehemiah 2:17-18).
2. Nehemiah and his brethren set out to do the work. Every person had a specified area of responsibility. In all, there were 42 groups of workers.

C. Nehemiah's courage.

1. Nehemiah had his enemies, among whom were Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian (Nehemiah 2:19-20).
2. But Nehemiah and his helpers believed in God and went ahead with their work. They were united at the beginning (Nehemiah 3:1-32).
3. After a time, however, there were murmurings and complaints, followed by actual apostasy and treason (Nehemiah 4:10; 5:1-5, 13).

D. Nehemiah's perseverance.

1. Honor is always due one who begins a great undertaking, and double honor is due one who begins a great work and completes it.
2. When Nehemiah's enemies saw that he was succeeding in spite of their opposition, they wanted to harm him. When Sanballat was rejected, he sent a fifth letter in which he mentioned certain rumors alleged to have reached his ears concerning Nehemiah's work and support (Nehemiah 6:1-7), but Nehemiah kept working (vs. 15).
3. When Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls, together with Ezra, he called all the people into the street before the water gate (Nehemiah 8:1). The Law of Moses was read to them in its entirety, and its ancient laws, usages, and customs were reestablished.

II. ***An Application For Today***

- A. A couple of centuries ago, spiritual Jerusalem was deeply afflicted. Many of her people had been swallowed up in the great apostasy which resulted in Roman Catholicism; the word of God was buried beneath a mass of human creeds and confessions; human ceremonies and forms had been substituted for the ordinance of Christ; the inhabitants of spiritual Zion were divided into warring factions.
- B. However, there was a remnant that was still true to God and to Jesus. They sought to obey divine truth in its purity and simplicity. A few men, who were deeply spiritual, set out to rebuild the walls around spiritual Zion. These men were Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, Moses E. Lard, and other noble souls.
- C. Nehemiah did not start out to build a new wall, but to restore the original wall which had been broken down in certain places. In a like manner, these men did not set out to organize a new church. They certainly did not start the church of Christ, they merely took a seed and replanted it (Luke 8:11). History shows that they studiously avoided the very appearance of having created a new denomination, for the simple reason that they abhorred all denominations. They appealed to all disciples of Christ to discard human names, creeds, and forms of worship, and to unite on the basis of the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4).
- D. The pioneers of the Restoration Movement encountered bitter opposition. Denominations forgot their differences and united in opposition, calling them "Campbellites," "legalists," etc. Their enemies misrepresented them by saying, "They do not believe in the Holy Spirit;" "They preach water salvation;" "They do not accept the Old Testament;" "They do not believe in heart-felt conversion;" etc. The preached word had a tremendous effect, though (1 Peter 1:22-23).

Entire denominational churches were converted. From just a small group of earnest Christians, this desire grew to millions of people today.

- E. Jesus Christ first laid the charge to His disciples and all who would follow after them to preserve unity (John 17:20-21). Unity is maintained and is therefore possible only by the preaching of the Bible (John 8:32; 17:17; Ephesians 4:1-6). It is possible for the church of Christ to exist today, preaching the same gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2), with saints reaching spiritual maturity and maintaining unity (Colossians 1:28).
- F. People in the first century preached and practiced doctrinal unity until sinful preaching and practices appeared. When they did, truth opposed them (Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:5). Brethren in America have preached and practiced doctrinal unity until sinful preaching and practices appeared. We must oppose them with truth and "maintain the unity of the Spirit." Although we too will face bitter opposition, this is what makes the church of Christ undenominational.

Conclusion. Churches of Christ must go forward. This means sharing Nehemiah's vision, work, courage, and perseverance. We cannot afford at any time to compromise the scriptural plea for unity on the basis of the New Testament. Now that you understand this scriptural plea and this undenominational position, it is your duty to get on the right side. No one can do their best unless they live up to the scriptural light which they possess. Obey the truth and do your part in rebuilding the walls of spiritual Zion.