

Rebuilding the Wall

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In former days, cities possessed strong exterior walls to protect their people and wealth. Many cities had quite extensive defense mechanisms built in conjunction with these walls: glacis, moats, drawbridges, arrow slits, towers, gates, portcullis, etc. Stories of castles and fortifications and the battles that raged before them still enthrall us.

These barriers kept danger and the enemy *outside* the walls. The gates and doors that pierced them allowed guards to monitor and control what came in and what went out. If the enemy breached the wall--or found a way under or over it--disaster loomed for the populace. If the wall was impregnable, the enemy often tried to lure the defenders out from behind their fortifications. When they took the bait, the trap closed, and the city could be taken.

We can learn vital spiritual lessons from these walls and fortresses. Believe it or not, wall building is a major responsibility for God's church right now!

Nehemiah's Wall

How carefully and strongly would we build a wall around our homes if our loved ones' lives depended on it? If we knew the enemy was nearby and intent on our families' destruction, how seriously would we consider the task of building a wall?

The book of Nehemiah describes such a time--and such a wall. God has not preserved the story as mere history; He records it as instruction, as an object lesson, for us today. As spiritual Jews building God's spiritual Temple, we must also be concerned about building a spiritual wall.

The book of Nehemiah deals with the time when a remnant of the Jews has recently returned from captivity and exile in Babylon (c. 445 BC). One hundred and forty years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Judah, burning its cities, razing its walls and removing the Jews to Babylon. Persia subsequently conquered the Babylonians (530 BC), allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Jeshua and others, the Jews had found the land desolate, populated by foreigners and open to attack. Though they had rebuilt the Temple, it was not enough.

Nehemiah is the Persian emperor's cupbearer, a high position of trust and responsibility. He reacts with alarm when he learns that Jerusalem's walls are virtually nonexistent (Nehemiah 1:1-4). Because there is *no* wall, the Jews are allowing too much of the pagan world back into their lives. Nehemiah learns that intermarriage with neighboring pagans is commonplace, and the Sabbath is not being kept holy. Worldliness is everywhere. Support for the Temple and the Levites has all but stopped. Some of the priests and leaders have allied themselves with the enemies of the Jews. The very sins that had

caused their captivity and exile are happening all over again! Realizing this, Nehemiah seeks and receives permission from the emperor to travel to Judah to rebuild its walls (Nehemiah 2:1-10).

Nehemiah realizes some will resist the idea of having a wall at all. Such people see no danger in living unprotected and even believe something can be gained by being open to the world. So Nehemiah surveys the wall's condition by night, in secret, as he prepares his plans to rebuild it (Nehemiah 2:11-13).

Chapters 3 and 4 describe the rebuilding process. Wall building is difficult, time-consuming, costly and often boring and repetitive. Inevitably, discouragement sets in and building slows practically to a halt with the wall only half-completed (Nehemiah 4:6).

Rubbish is everywhere. Few have any incentive to build anymore. Worse, word gets to Nehemiah that a conspiracy to attack Jerusalem is in the works, and the Jews feel that they will be overwhelmed (verses 7-12). In this crisis, Nehemiah conceives an ingenious idea to reignite the Jews' fervor for wall building:

Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people *according to their families*, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and *fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.*" (Nehemiah 4:13-14)

He makes each family responsible for part of the wall, probably the section nearest its home. How brilliant! How carefully would we construct a wall that would directly affect our safety and that of our families?

Our Wall Is down

How about us? Do we realize God has assigned us to build a wall as well? Notice the words of God in Ezekiel 22:25-30:

The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst. Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them. Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. Her prophets plastered them with un-tempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord GOD," when the LORD had not spoken. The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. So I sought for a man among them who

would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it. . . .

Do *we* have a wall to keep the enemies of God's way out of our lives and homes? Have we set boundaries against the world, or have we torn down the wall? If we have a wall, are we leaving the gates open and unguarded? Are we willing to *fight* to defend our families and our church? Or do we just let the enemy stream in unchallenged? Are we willing to stand up to the world?

This particular wall is not one of brick and stone, but a *spiritual* wall anchored by God, designed to keep spiritual problems *out*. I Timothy 5:8 says that if we fail to provide for the needs of our loved ones--both physically and spiritually--we are worse than an unbeliever! Have we done anything to protect our families--or has worldliness hurdled our puny walls, totally pervading every aspect of our lives?

Satan hates walls. "Let's all be one happy family," he whispers in our ears. "Walls are for the immature. You're spiritually mature now, so you can handle immorality without a problem." Don't fall for this line.

God Himself teaches us through His example to erect impregnable bulwarks against Satan. He placed cherubim with flaming swords at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24), and even New Jerusalem will have towering walls and gates (Revelation 21:12, 14). In type, the church is to be a wall (Song of Songs 8:10), within which peace dwells and righteousness flourishes.

God supplies this spiritual wall to those who seek His Way, His providence and His will. The work of rebuilding our personal wall is the effort we put into seeking a strong relationship with Him, and He then provides the defenses for us. *God becomes our wall*.

David understands this perfectly. He often praises God as his rock, his high tower, his fortress, his wall. "I will love you, O LORD, my strength. *The LORD* is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; . . . my stronghold" (Psalms 18:1-2). For a child of God, no other wall can effectively protect us from spiritual assaults: "He *only* is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved" (Psalm 62:2; see also Psalm 144:2; Proverbs 18:10; Jeremiah 16:9; etc.).

God puts a wall around His people to keep Satan at bay, as in the example of Job. Satan complains, "Have You not made a hedge [wall] around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side?" (Job 1:10). Only after God removed the wall could Satan attack Job--and he wasted no time doing so! Surely, we see the lesson in this.

If we reject God, break down the wall or neglect our relationship with Him, what happens? "[W]hoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent" (Ecclesiastes 10:8). The Bible depicts Satan as a serpent. Many of our brethren *have* allowed their walls to crumble, and Satan has struck.

Sometimes God Himself tears down our walls because of our sins (Isaiah 5:4-5). As Paul puts it, He delivers us to Satan for the destruction of our flesh in the hope we will repent (I Corinthians 5:5). The surest way to restore the wall is through sincere and complete repentance. Playing at the repair job, daubing bits of un-tempered mortar here and there, will only increase God's wrath (Ezekiel 13:8-16). Such a wall, lacking God, gives the impression of security but crumbles at the smallest enemy strike. We must be totally committed to restoring our neglected relationship with God, thus restoring God's presence as the wall.

The Group Wall

Part of Nehemiah's wall was constructed as a group effort, and so it is in God's church. At times we must work together to keep the group strong and defend its integrity. Each individual is an important part of the entire body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-27).

God becomes our wall, our defense, when we seek Him individually *and* as a group. When we do this repentantly and humbly, *God* heals the breach! Notice II Chronicles 7:14:

. . . if my people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Sometimes just one unrepentant person, like Achan (Joshua 7), can keep God's wall from protecting the group. Every person needs to seek God, restoring the relationship for the good of all.

We also help keep the body strong and the wall high when we encourage high standards in one another, starting with ourselves. For instance, we can begin with showing respect for Sabbath services where God is honored and worshiped. Our example should speak volumes. If that is not enough, we can bring it up in conversation, suggesting that improvements are in order. Those who are converted will immediately agree. How can anyone be against honoring God, unless they are not of the same mind?

If conversation after services degenerates into gossip or complaining, we can make efforts to change its course. This defends the group as well as the individual. We can encourage this brother to get back behind the wall to protect himself from Satan's bad attitudes. In fact, it is helpful to voice our discomfort with the conversation's direction immediately, for if it is not halted, the attitude can eventually infect the whole group. We should not be afraid to sound the alarm when we see one of our own straying outside the walls (Galatians 6:1-2).

We can further build the wall with prayer for one another. Prayer built much of Nehemiah's wall. If we see a brother or sister fighting a harmful attitude, temptation or sin, we can pray that Satan be vanquished and that our brother be victorious. As an example to us, Jesus tells Peter, "Indeed, Satan has asked for you . . . but I have prayed

for you, that your faith should not fail" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus prays for us also in John 17:20-24!

Fervent intercessory prayer erects this wall. Each Sabbath we hear announcements about trials, particularly health problems, some of our brothers and sisters are experiencing. We can *do* something about it. Pray! When God's people know others are praying for them and with them, they become very strong. Satan cannot prevail against a wall of godly people fighting him on their knees through the invincible power of God! "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

We can also pray for protection from Satan's attacks, which can take on many forms: distractions, philosophies, temptations, major and minor calamities and entertainment--even normally good things like prosperity can turn us from God. We need God's protective wall around us.

The group effort occurs when everyone nurtures and protects everybody else. Yes, we *are* our brother's keeper. We should love each other enough to take the time to encourage one another with a phone call or a warm note. Even an encouraging email is a wonderful thing on an otherwise gloomy day. Speaking with and praying for one another often are characteristics of God's special people (Malachi 3:16-18; Hebrews 3:13).

We can see all of this in the story of Nehemiah's wall. A synergy occurs when we work together to restore the walls, repair the breaches and reestablish the relationship with our Master that we have let slip. With great rejoicing, Nehemiah even asks God to bless "the people, the gates and the wall" (Nehemiah 12:27-43). Should we do any less with our spiritual wall?

The Family Wall

Beyond the group wall, we also need to be consciously putting up a personal, spiritual wall around our home, which should be a bastion against the ways of this world. The head of the house is accountable for what goes on in his home. Certain things should not enter it. It needs to be a sanctuary, not at all a part of this world's "house."

We all must work, shop and live in Satan's world for now, but home should be:

- A sanctuary where God is honored, worshiped and obeyed.
- A castle dedicated to holiness, to all that is right and good.
- A citadel where our children can learn to honor God and others.
- A bastion where we can pray, study and enjoy quiet family time.
- A stronghold where Satan's thoughts, ways, attitudes and teachings are kept out, uninvited.
- A safe haven that is guarded actively, vigorously and consciously.

If one's home does not fit these descriptions, perhaps the wall is breached or down.

When we grasp that God is the wall, we comprehend how incompatible His presence is to what amuses and feeds the world. We should be very cautious not to be entertained by what amuses the world. We may think we have our wall up, but Satan knows ways to sneak by our defenses. How?

Our television and VCR can be electronic Trojan horses. How many times have we watched a movie on video that we would never have gone to see in a theater? What kind of television shows do we allow ourselves and children to view? It is becoming increasingly impossible to have the world's entertainment in our homes and still honor God or His values. Do an experiment on your TV watching: Notice how many times during any show someone profanes God's name, violence or murder happens, fornication and adultery occurs and so on. What do God's people have in common with them? Keep such Satanic poison outside your wall!

Music is similar to video, and, while not all of this world's music is bad, some obviously is. Satan's world is a tree of good *and* evil. Do we let bad music pervert our thoughts and emotions? Music is a powerful tool with the ability to sway our minds, thus commercials often employ catchy tunes. Obviously, songs promoting anarchy, rebellion and evil, performed by defiant thugs, is not something in which we partake. But the same holds true for songs promoting sexual immorality, unfaithfulness, bitterness and defiance. We must evaluate the fruit of any music (Matthew 7:16-20). The fruit of good music is peace, joy and a desire to do good. When David played *his* style of music, demons left King Saul (I Samuel 16:23).

The Internet is another trap that can snare God's people in its World Wide Web. Every day over 300 new pornographic sites are added to the Web! This does not count the wacky, violent, perverted, destructive and ungodly sites by the thousands. Be sure to monitor what family members are accessing, and if there is a problem, software packages can filter out objectionable and pornographic sites. The Internet is not worth one's eternal life!

The standard given in Revelation 21:26-27 should be our own: Only what brings glory and honor to the King is allowed inside the wall. "But there shall by no means enter it *anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie . . .*" (verse 27).

What will be the result of our vigilance? Our families will feel safer and *be* safer with the wall up. A school yard beside a busy boulevard is a dangerous place without a wall or fence. Children play in a more relaxed way with the security a wall provides; they sense they are safe. Intuitively, they know their parents and teachers care. The same will happen for us at home: Everyone will feel more secure, knowing home is a safe haven where God is worshiped, His name is held in holy esteem, where standards of love and kindness rule.

Like Nehemiah, we need to survey the destruction of the wall in the church, our homes and our lives. It is our job right now--and vitally necessary--to be about the business of rebuilding it. We start by restoring our relationship with our great God.