

Working & Warring (1)

Text: Nehemiah 4:1-6

Introduction:

1. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built. In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
2. A defeated Christian, whose life is broken down, will not encounter much conflict in His Christian experience but a Christian who is serious about building walls of separation will!
3. Walls = denote protection and separation, a line of demarcation. Gates = a monitored point of access
4. In this chapter, we note three tactics used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy 3. Compromise

In this lesson we note the first of the three (contempt) and how it was overcome:

I. The Cause of the Contempt (Vs. 1)

A. Activity (1a)

1. "we build the wall" = the work of God was progressing
2. Spiritual activity in the Lord's work will attract the wrath of the wicked one and His evil forces
3. Ironside: "Heretofore the line of demarcation between the outwardly separated Israelites and these mixed nations had been almost obliterated, hence there was peace & quietness. But now a man has come who contemplates rearing a fresh wall of exclusion, and this is bitterly resented."
4. Opposition is not to be viewed as an unexpected intruder, but as a certainty for those who engage in the Lord's work. Opposition is an encouragement as it is a sign a work is going on for Him. (Lacey)

B. Anger (1b)

1. "wrath...great indignation" = the source of the mockery
2. 2:10 "*When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, **it grieved them exceedingly** that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.*"

II. The Characteristics of the Contempt (Vs. 2-3)

A. Scorn (Vs. 2)

1. What do these feeble Jews? = he highlights the apparent weakness of the people of God. The world fails to understand that the success

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of God's work is not dependent upon the weakness of man but upon the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:26-31; 2 Cor. 12:9-10)

2. Will they fortify themselves? = he understood the purpose of what they were doing. The world scorns the believer as he endeavors to strengthen and build up his life on the Word of God (Jude 1:20)
3. Will they sacrifice? = he understood the connection between the building of the walls and the success of the temple worship
4. Will they make an end in a day? = he implied they had not taken into account the magnitude of the task and would give up. In essence he says "will they finish it today?"
5. Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish? = he mocked the materials they were seeking to use.
 - i. Graphic picture. With the exception of new timber for the burn out gates, the material for the wall came from the existing stones from the old wall.
 - ii. Principle: Our need is not so much for innovation as it is for reformation. Our need is for a revival and renewal of the old paths, not something novel and "up to date"
 - iii. Our adherence to the old stones of truth is what invokes the laughter and scorn of the world. "What! You actually believe in the virgin birth?" "You actually believe that Christ is the only way of salvation?" "You actually believe the Bible is the Word of God?" "What! You actually believe in personal holiness & purity?"

B. Sarcasm (Vs. 3)

1. Tobiah takes the scorn to the next level and tries to imply that their efforts are worthless.
2. There was falsehood in his taunt. In actual fact, the wall that was being built and the people of God would be a strong, formidable fortress. Archeologist estimate the wall would have been about 9ft (3 meters) thick.
3. If his statement were true, why were they even taking any notice of what they were doing? Why raise up any opposition to something so weak? The reality is that they knew that what they were witnessing was something of substance, hence their anger and opposition.
4. Never underestimate the potency of a word war to undermine and damage a work of God. Prov. 18:21 "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue...*" Proverbs 25:18 "*A man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul, and a sword and a sharp arrow.*" 'maul' = a wooden hammer used in battle

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III. The Conquering of the Contempt (Vs. 4-6)

A. Prayer (Vs. 4-5)

1. Nehemiah does not respond in kind. We do not lower ourselves to the level of the enemy and use the same sort of weapons as them. **We do not achieve something spiritual by being carnal!** James 1:20 informs us that “...*the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*”
2. Nehemiah used spiritual weapons to combat what was ultimately spiritual opposition. Similarly, the believer is equipped for spiritual warfare with the armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18)
3. The centrality of prayer in Nehemiah’s life is again highlighted. The work commences in prayer, is sustained by prayer and concludes with prayer. He takes his problems to the Lord. There is no higher court of appeal than the throne room of heaven!
4. Some observations concerning the prayer itself:
 - a. It’s quality – a strong imprecatory prayer. He prays that God will deal firmly with the opposition. We ought to have strong feelings for the glory of God when we see His Name desecrated and blasphemed.
 - b. It’s motive – the glory of God. Helps us understand the severity of the prayer. Nehemiah did not pray this way because of self-interest and self-concern. He was zealous for the work of God.

B. Performance (Vs. 6)

1. Their achievement (6a)
 - a. The enemy’s purpose was to obstruct the progress of the work. Their desire was “to hinder it” (Vs. 8) and to “cause the work to cease” (Vs. 11)
 - b. The people of God did not cooperate with the enemy’s design and refused to be distracted from the task
 - c. Note Nehemiah’s words in 6:3 “*And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*”
 - d. What do we do when we are opposed in the work of God?
Answer: Keep on keeping on! Stay on the job! Keep building!
2. Their attitude (6b)
 - a. The secret to their success
 - b. The people of God had a working mindset

Conclusion:

1. Which side of the battle are you on? Are you both a servant & a soldier?
2. Are we fighting the battle with spiritual weaponry or the weapons of the flesh?