

Soldier Servants (1)

Battling & building, working & warring in the Christian life

Text: Nehemiah 4:1-15

Introduction:

1. Context: The walls of Jerusalem had been in disrepair for over 140 years. The rebuilding of the walls took place 92 years after Zerubbabel led the first group of captives back to rebuild the temple.
2. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built (See Chap. 3). In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
3. Walls = denote protection and separation, a line of demarcation. Gates = a monitored point of access.
4. In Nehemiah 4 & 6, we note three major tactics used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy 3. Compromise (Neh. 6). The attacks of chapter 4 focused on the people of God as a whole whereas the more subtle attacks of chapter 6 focused more on Nehemiah as the leader.

In this lesson we note the first two strategies of the enemy and how they were overcome.

I. THE CONTEMPT STRATEGY (VS. 1-6)

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

1. The Activity of God's People – "we builded the wall" (Vs. 1a). The work of God was progressing and on the whole, the picture of chapter 3 is one of joyful unity as they worked together.
 - a. Spiritual service attracts the devil's attack. A Christian or church that is not moving for the Lord will not attract too much attention from the enemy. But let a church say "Let us rise up and build" (Neh. 2:18) and all hell will quickly break loose. Opposition is a good sign the Lord's work is headed in the right direction.
 - b. Spiritual separation attracts the devil's attack. 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! The same applies to the local church. Harry Ironside writes, "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."

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2. The Anger of the Enemy (1b) – the enemy’s anger was the source of the mockery.
 - a. “wrath” = to glow, blaze up, grow warm. The enemy was hot with anger!
 - b. “great indignation” = “anger or extreme anger, mingled with contempt, disgust or abhorrence”.
 - c. Neh. 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.”

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

1. Scorn (Vs. 2) Five mocking questions are put forward by Sanballat. The enemy’s questions are calculated to cause doubt. Satan has been asking subtil questions from the beginning! The very first recorded words of Satan on earth are “Yea, hath God said?”
 - a. **What do these feeble Jews?** = he highlights the apparent weakness of the people of God. The world fails to understand that the success 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).
 - b. **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)
 - c. **Will they sacrifice?** = he understood the connection between the building of the walls and the success of the temple worship.
 - d. **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?”
 - e. **Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish?** = he mocked the materials they were seeking to use.
 - i. What a 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. The word ‘revive’ means “to make alive, restore to life.”
 - ii. Principle: Our need is not so much for innovation as it is for reformation. Our need is for a revival of and return to the ancient stones of truth, the old paths (Jer. 6:16), 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

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the Bible is the Word of God?” “What! You actually believe in personal holiness & purity?”

- iv. You can get into a LOT of trouble for simply raising up the ancient stones of truth and putting them back on the wall.
2. Sarcasm (Vs. 3)
 - a. Tobiah takes the scorn to the next level and tries to imply that their efforts are weak worthless.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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? If Nehemiah had built a quick, flimsy, showy wall out of sticks and straw the enemy wouldn't have raised a voice of protest. As much as the enemy mocked the ancient stones they were using, he knew there was strength in those stones.
 - d. 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...”

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

How was this first attack of the enemy overcome? Look at how Nehemiah and his workers responded. They responded with:

1. The Weapon of Prayer (Vs. 4-5)
 - a. Look at how Nehemiah **does not** respond. 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.*”
 - b. Look at how Nehemiah **does** respond. Nehemiah talked to God rather than wasting all his time replying to the sneering taunts of the enemy. 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).
 - c. 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!
 - d. Some observations concerning the prayer itself:
 - i. It's quality – a strong imprecatory prayer. He prays that God will deal firmly with the opposition. We ought to have

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- strong feelings for the glory of God when we see His Name desecrated and blasphemed.
- ii. 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.
 - e. Illustration: In October 1887, Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth were attempting to open new field in the northern section of the Province of Honan, China. Dr. Hudson Taylor, in a letter to the Goforths at this time wrote, "Brother, if you would enter that province, you must go forward on your knees."
2. The Weapon of Performance (Vs. 6)
- a. Their activity (6a)
 - i. 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)
 - ii. The people of God did not cooperate with the enemy's design and refused to be distracted from the task. The best response to the devil's darts is to pray, commit it all to the Lord, then get back to work.
 - iii. What do we do when we are opposed in the work of God? Answer: Keep on keeping on! Stay on the job! Keep building! Stay on the wall!
 - b. Their attitude (6b)
 - i. This was the secret to their success. The people of God had a working mindset.
 - ii. The word 'mind' comes from the same Hebrew word for heart. It speaks of the inmost being, the feelings, the will and the intellect. The people of God had a heart for the work of God and that kept them going despite the attacks of the enemy.

II. THE CONSPIRACY STRATEGY (VS. 7-15)

A. The Provocation of the Conspiracy (Vs. 7-8, 11)

The progress of the work arouses the fury of the enemy and the battle intensifies.

- 1. The People (Vs. 7)
 - a. Their Identity
 - i. North: Sanballat & Samaritans
 - ii. East: Tobiah & Ammonites
 - iii. South: Geshem & Arabians
 - iv. West: Ashdodites (Philistines)

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The people of God were literally **surrounded** by enemies. We often find ourselves in a similar place. But we need to be reminded that we are not just surrounded by enemies, we are also surrounded by the Lord! Psalm 34:7 “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” Illustration: 2 Kings 6:14-16 – “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”

b. Their Unity

- i. They all conspired ‘together’ (Vs. 7).
- ii. These factions were often in conflict with one another but they united quickly against God, His people and His work.
- iii. Illustration: The many faces of the world united against Christ at His crucifixion
 - Pilate and Herod united (Luke 23:12)
 - Civil and Ecclesiastical authorities united
 - Sadducee and Pharisee united
- iv. The world, the flesh and the devil are all united in their opposition to the work of God. Remember that a unified enemy will make short work of a disunified people.

2. The Plan (Vs. 8)

- a. To Fight – while Christians waste time arguing whether we should be involved in the battle, the enemy is resolved to wage war!
- b. To Hinder – Their resolve was to stop the work of God – “to hinder it” (Vs. 8); “...cause the work to cease” (Vs. 11). The whole purpose of the attack was to STOP the work of God in its tracks.
- c. To Infiltrate (Vs. 11) – The enemy would seek to use subtility and surprise (guerilla warfare).
 - i. This is how the wicked one works. E.g., The apostates in Jude 1:4 are described as “certain men crept in unawares”. From the beginning, Satan has used subtility to attack the people of God (Gen. 3). Satan knows that one of the most effective strategies is to blow the house of God up from within.
 - ii. “Though the enemy likes to operate secretly by sneaky conduct and disguised doings, it is still very difficult to convince church people of this feature of the enemy. Many church folk seem to not want to see evil in anything and refuse to believe the warnings given by the men of God of the hidden evil in so many things today. But sticking our head in the sand to ignore the ways of evil is only to give evil a great advantage over us.”
John G. Butler

B. The Promoters of the Conspiracy (Vs. 10-12)

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The enemy from without utilized complainers and compromisers from within. The heat of the battle tends to bring to surface the weak points amongst the people of God.

1. The Complainers (Vs. 10)

- a. The source of the complaint – the tribe of Judah. Judah was the strong, kingly tribe! Opposition often comes from the most unexpected sources. Wiersbe: “In over forty years of ministry, I have learned that, in the Lord’s work, discouragers are often doubters and compromisers. There is usually something wrong in their spiritual walk.” Their problem was genuine but their conclusions were wrong.
- b. The motive behind the complaint – Judah’s family connections!
 - i. Tobiah had a close relationship with Judah through his wife and daughter in law (6:18-19) and he knew just how to pull the family strings to his advantage. “The ties of marriage were stronger than their bonds of commitment to the Lord” (Wiersbe)
 - ii. Marriages with the heathen were forbidden by God for His people. A biblical marriage is “honorable in all, and the bed undefiled” (Heb. 13:4) but an un-Scriptural marriage (e.g., an unequal yoke) leads to many problems. John Butler writes, “Some of Nehemiah’s worst problems from within the camp came from people involved with bad marriages. Unsanctified marriages are always a pain in the neck to the work of God. We have personally found in our over forty years of ministry that those who are problems (the murmurers, complainers, dissidents, discouragers etc....) in the church frequently have marriage problems. In fact, marriage problems are almost always present with troublemakers in the church.”
 - iii. Warning! Watch out when the devil finds a weak link in the family chain and gives it a rattle that you don’t go flying off out of the will of God in the battle.

2. The Compromisers (Vs. 11-12)

- a. The enemy voices their threat in Vs. 11.
- b. Those living near the enemy become carriers of the propaganda (Vs. 12). The enemy filled their ears with tales of conquest.
- c. The people who become launching pads for Satanic darts are those who have positioned themselves closest to the enemy and compromise. The worldly Christian is a ready tool for Satan.
- d. “ten times” = this dart was passed on repeatedly. The phrase “ten times” is sometimes used in the O.T. as a figure of speech meaning many times instead of a literal number. Our figure of speech “umpteen times” would convey the thought.

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- e. “From all places whence ye shall return” = The thought conveyed is that wherever the people turned, the enemy would attack them.
- f. Note: Some of these people may have not been compromisers as much as they were **panickers**. They unwisely passed on the hyped-up sound bites of the enemy and sowed seeds of fear into their fellow labourers.

C. The Prevailing over the Conspiracy (Vs. 9, 13-15)

Nehemiah did not dialog. He acted!

1. Intercession (Vs. 9)

- a. Prayerfulness (9a). Prayer is not a last resort; it is a first resort and a powerful weapon against the enemy. Even in Nehemiah’s day where there was a physical component to the battle (actual fighting), the war was still primarily of a spiritual nature. David & Goliath is another example of this (1 Samuel 17).
- b. Watchfulness (9b) We are to be alert and discerning of spiritual dangers. Christ exhorted the disciples to “watch and pray”. “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;” (Col. 4:2)

2. Fortification (Vs. 13)

- a. Standing Firm (public stand). Strategic places on the wall were guarded.
 - i. A position of altitude on the wall would do two things:
 - 1. It would help God’s people see the enemy. We view the battlefield from the vantage point of heavenly places (Eph. 1:20; 2:6).
 - 2. It would help the enemy see God’s people and be deterred. The enemy would know **exactly where they stood!** A public, visible, identifiable position was taken.
 - ii. Nehemiah again positions people according to their families. We need to learn to see the connection between our collective stand as a body of believers and the safety and protection of our families. We need to be reminded of the vital role heads of homes play in protecting their families in the battle. Church members need to remember that the equality of the local church will rarely rise above the spirituality of its families.
- b. Standing Armed (equipped). Our weapons are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4). Ephesians 6 – the believer is equipped of God for spiritual battle.

3. Exhortation (Vs. 14)

The men the primary ones addressed (Vs. 14). The men are to take a lead in standing on the wall and fighting the enemy.

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- a. Don't Fear! Fear is a major component of the enemy's tactics. So often Scripture exhorts us to "fear not".
 - b. Have Faith!
 - i. Remember the Lord! The battle is the Lord's! (1. Samuel 17:47)
 - ii. We are to focus on His might and power. God is described as 'great' and 'terrible' (same description as 1:5) 'terrible' means "one to be feared, revered". He is an Awesome, Almighty God.
 - c. Go Fight!
 - i. Fight for your brethren in the Lord.
 - ii. Fight for your family – sons, daughters, wives.
 - iii. Fight for your homes.
4. Exertion (Vs. 15)
- a. The enemy's plots were successfully foiled by the public stand of God's people.
 - b. The work was now able to resume. The battle is not an end in itself. The purpose for the fight is to maintain and continue the work of God.
 - c. Contend for the faith so that you can then build yourself up on your most holy faith (Jude). Battle so that you might then build!
 - d. Every one returned "unto his work". For God's work to be a success, it means every individual finding his place in the local church and doing his/her part for the cause of Christ.

Conclusion: How did the people of God have success? They had a mind to work (Vs. 6), a heart to pray (Vs. 9), an eye to watch (Vs. 9), an ear to hear (Vs. 20) and a godly leader with the faith and courage to stand (Nehemiah).

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?