

Soldier Servants (2)

Battling & building, working & warring in the Christian life

Text: Nehemiah 4:10-23

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 in 445 B.C.
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. 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 continue our study of the strategies of the enemy and how they were overcome.

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

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

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

1. Scorn (Vs. 2)
2. Sarcasm (Vs. 3)

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)
2. The Weapon of Performance (Vs. 6)

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

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

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

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)
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.

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- 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.
- 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 Arrect (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 parents play (particularly dads) in protecting their families in the battle. Church members need to remember that the quality of the local church will rarely rise above the spirituality of its families.

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- 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.

 - 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. Your brothers and sisters in Christ need you to take a stand with them and for them in the battle.
 - ii. Fight for your family – sons, daughters, wives. Your family needs you to be a soldier.
 - 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. **God** "brought their counsel to naught".
 - 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 part for the cause of Christ.

III. THE COUNTER STRATEGY (VS. 16-23)

Having learned of the enemy's tactics, Nehemiah sets up a defense plan so they can continue in the work and at the same time, be in a position to resist the enemy. Note "**from that time forth**" in Vs. 16. They learned from their experiences to be better prepared and equipped for the future to face the enemy. Several key things were put in place:

A. The Arming of the People (Vs. 16-18)

- 1. The Involvement of Leadership (Vs. 16)

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- a. Nehemiah's Personal Retinue (Vs. 16a) These were Nehemiah's right-hand men (Vs. 23), his leadership team. It is important that those in leadership take the initiative in the spiritual battle God's people find themselves in.
- b. The People's Rulers (Vs. 16b) They were there to encourage the workers in their labors and provide leadership in the event of an attack. As a worker, knowing that those in leadership are standing guard, would give you a sense of security and thus your hands would be strengthened for the work.
2. The Inclusion of Laymen (Vs. 17-18)
 - a. The Bearers (Vs. 17) Their task was to remove rubbish. There were those whose role it was to load and others to carry. Burden bearing is a very important role in the local church (Gal. 6:2).
 - b. The Builders (Vs. 18). Those tasked with the actual construction on the wall. Their sword was hung at their side as their role demanded the use of both hands.
 - c. The picture of the **Sword & the Trowel**: Both speak of the ministry of the Word.
 - i. The trowel speaks of the ministry of the Word in edification, **building up in the faith**.
 - ii. The sword speaks of the ministry of the Word in contention, **defending the faith**.
 - iii. The sword and trowel principle seen in Jude (Note Vs. 3 & 20)

B. The Alarm for the People (Vs. 18-20)

1. The Position of the Trumpet (Vs. 18)
 - a. 'trumpet' = the shofar trumpet made out of the horn of a ram or goat. It was used for giving signals for war as in the case of Joshua (6:10-16) and Gideon (Judges 7:18-22).
 - b. "by me" = Nehemiah was a master organizer and delegator, but he took personal ownership of this most important role of warning God's people. Note: Those given the oversight of the people of God must take this role seriously.
 - c. The example of Isaiah 58:1 "*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*" Note: It is interesting that of all the instruments God could have used to describe the ministry of preaching, he used the trumpet. Our denunciations of sin are not to be soft, smooth and compromising, but loud, distinct, clear and sharp.
2. The Purpose of the Trumpet (Vs. 19-20a)
 - a. To **alert** (Vs. 19) and **assemble** the people (Vs. 20a). The trumpet blast would alert the people of God to which part of the wall was under attack from the enemy. They could then

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concentrate their forces at the point where the enemy was **currently** challenging. Imagine the enemy challenging at the Fish Gate and the watchman sounding at the Valley Gate! The enemy often attacks different parts of the wall at different times. Even in modern warfare, large sections of the war front often go through silent periods with little to know action.

- b. Challenge: We seem to be very good at blowing the trumpet at places on the wall that are important but NOT under attack at the present. Martyn Luther: “If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at THAT point.”
 - c. Challenge: We need to keep our ears alert for trumpet warnings from God’s Word and rally to the cause of earnestly contending for the faith. As we work for the Lord, we need to be listening for the Heavenly trumpet blast that is going to call us home to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18 “For the Lord himself shall descend...”)
3. The Perspective of Faith (Vs. 20b)
 - a. With all their preparation and organization for battle, Nehemiah knew that the outcome of the battle would always be determined by the intervention of God’s power. Nehemiah was a man of faith and had a God-centered approach to the battle.
 - b. David declared to Goliath “the battle is the LORD’s” (1 Sam. 17:47)

C. The Alertness of the People (Vs. 21-23)

1. The Division of Labor (Vs. 21)

- a. Half of Nehemiah’s servants worked.
- b. Half of Nehemiah’s servants watched.
- c. The work commenced in dawn and ended in night – “from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.”

2. The Decision for Lodging (Vs. 22)

- a. Workers were to sleep at night within the walls of Jerusalem for safety and also to strengthen the cities security. This would represent a further sacrifice for those living outside Jerusalem. It meant being willing to be inconvenienced for the work of God.
- b. Staying in the company of God’s people would also help to overcome the problem of those living near the enemy becoming carriers of evil tidings (Vs. 12).

3. The Dedication of Leadership (Vs. 23)

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- a. Due to the dual responsibilities of Nehemiah and his team to labor in the day and watch at night, they didn't even have time to change their clothes.
- b. This statement not made of anyone else. "He thus set a blessed example, in the circle of his own responsibility of personal devotedness."
- c. Nehemiah did not require sacrifice of others without setting an example himself. They were willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of God's work.
- d. Wiersbe: "Leaders are often awake when others are asleep, and working when others are resting." Godly leadership a protection for God's people. Important that you seek to have your family under the oversight of a local church and pastor.
- e. Illustration: Paul's "night and day" labors

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?
3. What is your attitude to the ministry of warning? Are you listening for the trumpet warnings of the Word of God and the trumpet call of the rapture?