

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bible-student\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php)

will be destroyed and its leader, the King of fierce countenance, will be 'broken without hand'.

(6) *The Effect of the Vision.* The vision of the Gentile Empires rising one after another as wild beasts out of the tumultuous element of political and international strife, of the prince who will rule over the confederacy of western powers, and of their destruction at the advent of the Son of Man and the establishment of His glorious kingdom, as recorded in Ch. 7, gave Daniel many troubled thoughts that altered his physical appearance: but he kept the prophetic revelation in his heart for further cogitation. The effect of the vision of Chapter 8 and its interpretation, particularly the predicted pernicious activities of the king of fierce countenance, was more severe. Daniel's own people, God's chosen race, and their land, were to experience unparalleled affliction and tribulation; and, as he reflected on this, he was puzzled and faint with astonishment. Further reflection on the subject produced sickness from which it took him several days to recover, and, when he did, he was able to leave his bed and attend to his duties as a minister in the Babylonian court. The beginning of the chapter that follows proves that the vision had also the effect on Daniel that the consideration of it should have on each of us; it inspired him to further study of the Scriptures and drove him to his knees in prayer. This proved to be God's way of preparing him to receive further predictions, commencing with the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks.

## THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

E. G. ASHBY, M.A., B.D.

### II. Rebuilding (chs. 3-6)

*Introduction.* There is something very fascinating about this section of the book. Building—or rebuilding—is essentially something constructive, like all true Christian service, whether the building up of individual believers or churches; or what is sometimes a more delicate work requiring great sympathy and tact, the rebuilding or refashioning of a work to the glory of God out of the shattered wreckage of past failure. Nehemiah here

gets to work, but active work is bound to mean opposition which may be varied in its manner of approach, the most dangerous being that which works subtly from within.

- Summary.*
- Ch. 3. Rebuilding
  - Ch. 4. Resistance in one form or another
    - Resentment ch. 2:10
    - Ridicule ch. 2:19,20—contempt
    - Ridicule ch. 4:1-3—anger
      - met by Reliance on God ch. 4:4,5
      - Resolute action ch. 4:6
    - Resistance ch. 4:7,8
      - met by Resort to God ch. 4:9
      - Readiness for the foe ch. 4:9,11-23
    - Rubbish ch. 4:10
  - Ch. 5. Relation of social injustices ch. 5:1-5
    - Rebuke ch. 5:6-10
    - Restoration ch. 5: 11-19
  - Ch. 6. Resort to subterfuge ch. 6:1-4
    - Report of rebellion ch. 6:5-9
    - Refusal to be tempted ch. 6:10-15
    - Realisation of God's work ch. 6:16-19

*Rebuilding.* This may be regarded as a page from God's remembrance of man's spiritual activity. Perhaps the most wonderful fact about it is its attention to detail. Several points may here be noted.

(1) The work began and ended with the Sheep Gate (vs. 1 and 32), thus indicating that the work of repair was complete in its scope. This was undoubtedly the gate mentioned in John 5:2 as Bethesda, and the fact that it was the work of the *priests* is an indication that it was in the neighbourhood which would require many sheep for its sacrifices. It is also a symbolic reminder that all real church work begins and finishes with sacrifice; HIS for our Redemption from dead works, and ours to spend and be spent in His service.

(2) It is fitting that religious leaders should set the example (v. 1), for all who take any responsibility in spiritual things must realise that personal example is far more potent than mere exhortation. The leader first goes that way himself, and such example is the strongest incentive to action, as Paul well knew

(cf. Phil. 4:9; I Cor. 4:16, 11:1). But unfortunately outward activity in church work does not necessarily guarantee spiritual loyalty (cf. Ch. 13:4, 7, where Eliashib is in close co-operation with Tobiah).

(3) The rebuilding of verse 1 actually fulfilled the statement of Jeremiah 31:38, but that chapter describes Israel in the last days and is of much wider scope than the mere partial regathering and rebuilding described here. The Church may have many times of visitation and blessing anticipating in measure the ultimate blessing when God's purposes are fulfilled at the Lord's return.

(4) Of many it is recorded that they built over against their own house (vs. 10, 23, 28, 29). This is a most important principle of all true evangelism in two respects: Firstly, it records individual activity. As Dr Maclaren puts it: 'For one man that says, "What can I do?" there are twenty who say "Somebody should do something . . .", and the individual calmly and comfortably slips his neck out of the collar and leaves it on the shoulders of these abstractions'. It is so very easy to leave it to the other man.

In the second place each started at home. 'Go home to thy friends', said the Lord to the restored maniac, 'and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee'. 'Beginning at Jerusalem', is the Lord's instruction to Peter and the other Apostles, and the man who is not willing to begin there will never be effective in operation anywhere else.

(5) It appears that not all who helped were residents of Jerusalem (e.g., the men of Jericho, verse 2, and of Gibeon verse 7). Parochialism should give place to the larger vision and we should be concerned not merely with our own vicinity but also with wider aspects of the work of God. (But it is true this latter name may merely denote a clan who kept together during the Exile and subsequently, cf. Ezra 2:34).

(6) In most efforts for God there will be exceptions. There were some here who failed to help (v. 5); perhaps thinking it beneath their dignity, and there remains the eternal record to their shame and disgrace. On the other hand one at least was marked

out for his singular zeal (v. 20). May we be followers of Baruch's earnestness rather than imitators of the slackness of the Tekoite nobles.

(7) God's record is personal: it appears that one who helped was merely a lodger with one room (v. 30), yet he wished to share in this great enterprise. Another was distinctly a younger son (of Zalaph = 'purification', v. 30), though there is no record of his elder brother's activity. How often in Scripture has the younger been a man of spiritual purpose and energy. Some helped twice, e.g., Meremoth (vs. 4 and 21) and the Tekoites (vs. 5 and 27—perhaps to atone for the failure of their nobles), and some engaged in co-operative effort (Jehoiada and Meshullam, v. 6), and even the ladies gave their assistance (vs. 12 cf. Phil. 4:3). Paul reminds us that God has just such a personal record of Christian service and every man's work will be made manifest (1 Cor. 3:13). There will be reward of loss, honour or dishonour.

*Resentment* follows: Rebuilding in the spiritual sphere naturally provokes opposition of one kind or another. In fact, if we never meet with any opposition we may well wonder whether our work is so weakly and ineffective that the Adversary need not bother about us!

Sanballat (ch. 2:10) was clearly the chief opponent, and the Elephantine Papyri show that he was later governor of Samaria and no doubt he hoped to include Judah as well. 'San' is connected with 'Sin', the moon-god, and his name means 'Sin giveth life'. He presumably came from Bethhoron a city of great strategic importance, as may be seen in the career of Joshua and Judas Maccabeus. He was assisted by Tobiah the Ammonite, and Ammon is suggestive of the flesh. The Devil can always find as opponents to God's work, those with an axe to grind, whether in false religion or to suit the dictates of the flesh.

Next is *Ridicule*. (Ch. 2:19, 20; ch. 4:1-3). This was shown both in mere contempt and anger. 'Will they make an end in a day?' 'Will they revive the stones out of heaps of rubbish?' Such ridicule is dangerous, because the facts seem to give point to it, and it is easy to ruin a work in its initial stages by over-exaggerating its weakness and insignificance. Perhaps this

accounts for the anger of Romulus against his brother Remus in the story of the founding of Rome.

In ch. 2 the opposition seems directed at their motive, construing this effort as rebellion, though as Nehemiah had been to the governors of the province they can hardly have been ignorant of his authority. But it pleased them to take a distorted view and regard Nehemiah's efforts as unworthy in motive and purpose. In chap. 4 they resent rather the manner of the work. So the enemy of souls launches his attacks, through his agents, on either our aims or our activities.

*Reliance on God.* Clearly the answer is to trust God, though we would not pray as Nehemiah prayed. The Lord prayed for His persecutors. Matthew Henry says these words were spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy than of prayer; he thinks that Nehemiah realised they were past praying for, being hardened and unrepentant. The circumstances here are not unlike those in 2 Kings 18, 19, where Rabshakeh tried by his taunts to undermine the fidelity of the men of Jerusalem. The Assyrians soon passed from defiance of the inhabitants to defiance of GOD. In v. 5 here, 'Thee' is an insertion but it seems required, in which case Nehemiah regards their opposition as against GOD, hence the terms of his prayer.

*Resolute Action.* But the work went on till the wall was complete to half the required height, for 'the people had a mind to work'. Graciously Nehemiah takes no credit to himself but praises his people. Opposition either causes a work to flag or it quickens the workers into greater activity. But it is just here, when a work is half completed that trouble may come. When the initial enthusiasm has cooled and the end is not yet in sight difficulties and discouragements seem most burdensome. Especially is this true if the work has been half done in such a way that the less keen may persuade themselves that enough has been done. It is here that a leader can help and Nehemiah did not fail.

*Resistance.* Now the resistance becomes more marked and open: sometimes the Devil is as 'a roaring lion', trying to instil fear into men's hearts. Their opponents were unanimous (v. 8), crafty (v. 11), cruel (v. 11), and confident of success (v. 11).

Those who engage in the forefront of the Lord's work, such as missionaries, often have to meet opposition which is completely ruthless and unscrupulous. Here Sanballat and Tobiah are joined by a hostile coalition of different races, the Ammonites being fellow-countrymen of Tobiah, the Arabians of Geshen (ch. 2:19), and the Ashdodites being Philistines, all resentful of one thing—the recovery of Jerusalem. So an evil purpose will unite enemies as Herod and Pilate united against Christ. The metaphor in verse 7 is that of an open wound which is 'made up' by the application of a bandage. The Devil always likes to see breaches in the work of God, for that always means weakness and loss of power.

*Resort to God.* Prayer is the obvious answer, and the sense of nearness ('our God') is a great help. Nehemiah rightly puts this first, before any reference to human expediencies employed.

*Readiness for the Foe.* But men must watch as well as pray. Nor can they afford to let up at all, for day and night this spiritual warfare is going on. In this case four things are specially worthy of note:

1st. Encouragement from their leader (v. 14). This exhortation to courage was based on two commands; they were to remember the Lord and His power, and to fight for their families, for it is clear that their own lives and all those dear to them depended on their efforts.

2nd. Organisation (vs. 13, 16-22). Both the 'lover' and the 'higher' parts of Christian service need to be guarded, and they were grouped 'after their families' where there would be the strongest incentive to action. Various arms were issued to these (v. 13), and the Christian too is to take unto him the whole armour of God. Nehemiah's servants (probably his personal bodyguard as governor) were divided into watchers and workers. Those engaged on the wall as hodmen carried their burden with one hand and their weapon in the other: those whose building operations required both hands were also armed with a sword. So work and watchfulness went hand in hand, and the leader kept his trumpeter with him to rally the separated workmen at the slightest sign of danger. So in the work of God we are many yet all one: separated to our different tasks yet working together for the common good, and not so busy in the work that we forget to watch.

3rd. Realisation that in spite of all these precautions their dependence must be only on God (v. 20).

4th. Readiness to endure hardship (v. 23). The Hebrew of this verse is difficult; the R.V. rendering it 'everyone went with his weapon to the water', but at least it implies their willingness to put up with any hardships involved.

*Rubbish* to be dealt with. External opposition was not their only difficulty. As indicated in v. 12 it is clear that the Jews from small towns and villages who had sent their able bodied men to help in Jerusalem were now alarmed for their safety and urged their recall. In addition there was internal discouragement due to rubbish. This was a deposit left over from the past. In Christian service likewise habits carried over from the old life can be an enormous hindrance. Moreover a work of God may be hindered by a mere tradition of the elders no longer relevant to present conditions, or even by the mistaken policy of a former generation.

*Relation to Social Injustices.* Some think that this reference is to a later period in Nehemiah's administration, as it was not likely that it all developed within 52 days (ch. 6:15). Here internal conditions threatened to jeopardize the success of the whole work—due to human selfishness. Some mortgaged their property to obtain food, others sold their children into slavery in order to pay the royal taxes; (for the Law concerning this cf. Levit. 25: 25-34 and Exod. 21:2-6). As the New Testament makes clear justification by faith does not mean an indifference to social duties; on the contrary it carries with it the highest possible standard, everything is to be done in love and it is by *their fruits* that Christians are known.

*Rebuke.* Nehemiah was angry and did some very serious thinking (v. 7), and then rebuked the rulers, for he realised the necessity of a good moral witness before their heathen opponents (v. 9). Usury was allowed by the Law but should not have been practised on a fellow-Israelite in these circumstances (Deut. 23:19, 20; and Matt. 25:27). It seems that Nehemiah and others had already redeemed some Jews from the neighbouring heathen, then their own people oppressed them! It is not clear from verse 10 (cf. A.V. and R.V.) whether Nehemiah did or did not lend them



money at interest. Perhaps he had unthinkingly done so, but in any case the point at issue seems to be the abuse of usury. It is not merely a question of one's rights, the Christian will willingly forego these to further the work of God (cf. I Corinth 8:13; 10:33).

*Restoration.* Nehemiah urged them to make restoration, the hundredth part being probably monthly (i.e., 12 per cent), and he put them under a solemn oath to do this. He was in a good position to urge this course of action in view of his own generous behaviour; he had used his princely wealth to feed 150 every day, and had not exercised his rights in taking a salary (£2000 a year!) for which the people would have been taxed. Nor had he indulged in any land speculation: he had acted in the fear of God, or in N.T. language—'the love of Christ constrained him'.

*Resort to Subterfuge.* Three further attempts were then made to trap Nehemiah, but for each he had the appropriate response. The first was an appearance of friendliness (for Satan can also be like an angel of light), with a desire to meet at Ono some 20 miles north of Jerusalem where murder could easily have been done if Nehemiah ventured so far afield. 'I am doing a great work' was a sufficient answer, and being fully occupied with Christian work is the best answer to some temptations. Not once only, but four times did he refuse this.

*Report of Rebellion.* Failing that, his enemies tried compromise: Sanballat professed to want to help Nehemiah by discussing with him how to suppress a rumour of rebellion. This rumour was one which Sanballat 'feigned out of his own heart', and it could be quite easily done by perverting the sense of some Messianic prophecy. Nehemiah's answer was prayer: 'Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands' . . .

*Refusal to be tempted.* The third attempt was very subtle. His enemies hired certain prophets and a prophetess, and they made an appeal by use of fear in an endeavour to get Nehemiah into the Temple. Fear? 'Should such a man as I flee?' Go into the Temple? 'I will not go in'. If he was a priest (cf. Introduction Pt. I) this was merely an attempt to discredit him as a coward. But if he was not a priest he had no right to enter the Temple, in which case his knowledge of the Word of God kept

him from error. Perhaps his enemies hoped God would slay him for such disobedience: even if not, his authority as an upholder of the Law would be finished.

*Realisation of God's Work.* The completion of the wall in spite of so many difficulties—and many Jews were in league with the enemy (v. 18)—made his enemies realise that this was indeed a work of God (v. 16). After that the opposition does not seem to have been active, but it still continued (v. 19).

*(To be continued)*

## PEN PORTRAITS FROM OLD RECORDS

W. WILCOX

### 2. Potters and Planters (1 Chron. 4: 22, 23)

Interspersed among these names there is found a delightful picture of ancient workers. It is not made clear who they were, and so they must pass down in the records with myriads of other un-named workers who, nevertheless, did their tasks well, fulfilled their duties faithfully, and so are fitted for honourable mention. It is not the high nature of the task, but the faithful discharge of daily duties that bring to these a distinctive place among so numerous a company of worthy men. Their work was of a humble nature, including the making of the earthen vessels for the use of the King's household, and in the cultivation of crops for food supplies. The performance of their tasks helped in its orderly arrangements and so was of material aid to the work of the Kingdom.

So it is in every society—there are those un-noticed and un-named without whose faithful service the society could not cohere or function. In the Christian community it is so, there ever being in the local church a number whose service is necessary, but which is so regarded that it obtains no honourable mention and receives little, if any, recognition.

But in our record there was one who recognized its value, and he kept these workers near to his palace and ever in attendance.