

### Putting on the Armor

#### Nehemiah 4:13-15

Nehemiah 4:13-15 – *“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.<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.”*

#### Background Notes

Nehemiah lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC. God raised him up to lead the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. The city walls were destroyed when the Babylonian army, under Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem in 586BC. When the Jewish people returned from their 70-year exile in Babylon, they first rebuilt the ruined Temple. A number of years had gone by, but they had not gotten around to rebuilding the ruined walls. Once they started rebuilding under Nehemiah’s leadership, wall building went quite rapidly.

But no sooner had the wall building begun than opposition from the surrounding provinces of the Persian Empire began as well. These provinces did not want a strong Jerusalem. A strong capital city like Jerusalem would be a threat to them. The enemies were the Samaritans to the north, Ammonites to the east, Arabs to the south, and Ashdodites to the west. They planned to attack Jerusalem, put an end to the wall building, and thus end Jerusalem’s rise to a place of power and prominence.

Word of the planned attack leaked out, and as a result, most of the Jews were afraid. They were already tired and discouraged because of the hard work involved in clearing away the ruins and building the wall, and now they were filled with fear. The great wall-building project was about to come to a standstill. Physical and psychological fatigue has taken its toll. But Nehemiah was not running scared. When he learned of the planned attack, he took action.

In Nehemiah 4:13-15, Nehemiah’s actions were designed to confront the enemy and thwart the enemy’s plan to attack Jerusalem: : *“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” (v14).*

- He positioned armed guards at certain places along the wall.
- He exhorted the people not to be afraid.
- He reminded them to depend on the Lord.

- He challenged them to fight for their families.

The strategy worked. The enemy realized that the God of Israel had intervened, and the element of surprise had been lost, so they called off the attack. *“And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work” (v15).* So what did Nehemiah do at this point? He continued to build! He got everyone back up on the wall, and they continued to build the wall.

## Doctrinal Point

### Offensive warfare defeats Satan.

The Bible certainly teaches that offensive warfare defeats Satan, and it is well illustrated here. We've already referred to Ephesians 6. In that passage the armor of God is listed. We are to put on the spiritual armor of God so we can be “on offense” in spiritual warfare.

Notice that there is no armor listed for the back? There was armor for every other part of the body, but not for the back. We're not to run away scared. We're to stand on offense against satanic attacks, and fight with the sword of the Spirit – the Word of God. Our Lord withstood Satan in the wilderness using Scripture three times over – “It is written.”

Now notice how Nehemiah practiced offensive warfare to defeat Satan and defeat the surrounding enemies. There's no doubt that Satan was at work behind the enemies in Nehemiah's day, and this illustrates that Satan is behind the spiritual battles that we fight. In the book of Nehemiah, all the tactics of the opposition are illustrations of principles that we should use and practice in spiritual warfare today.

Let's look at how Nehemiah practiced offensive warfare to defeat the enemy.

a. Nehemiah set a guard (v13).

He had already set a watch, and he was continuing to pray, and now he also set a guard: *“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.”* These lower parts of the wall would be the exposed and less protected areas of the half built wall. So Nehemiah set armed guards there, not only to defend and protect these areas, but so the enemy would see that the Jews had weapons and were ready to fight. Nehemiah set the armed guards according to families because he knew that the family units would stand and fight for one another.

In offensive spiritual warfare we must be on guard, and we must be armed as well. Again, we refer to Ephesians 6 and the spiritual armor we must put on in order to defeat Satan. Ephesians 6:14-17: *“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*

b. Nehemiah told the people not to be afraid (v14).

If you're afraid, you can no longer take the offensive in warfare. And we don't need to be afraid, because the Lord has promised to be with us! When Israel was about to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, they knew they would have to fight battles. So the Lord told them: *"Hear, O Israel: Today you are on the verge of battle with your enemies. Do not let your heart faint, do not be afraid, and do not tremble or be terrified because of them; for the Lord your God is He who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you"* (Deuteronomy 20:3-4)

The Lord has made the same promise to us. In Hebrews 13:5, the Lord says, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you."* Are you afraid of the future and what the future holds? Don't be afraid. The enemy doesn't hold your future – GOD does! We're not to fear. And when we're not afraid, we can maintain the offensive stance in spiritual warfare. When we run scared, we lose the offensive.

c. Nehemiah told them to remember the Lord, great and awesome (v14).

This also is offensive warfare. Remembering all that the Lord had done in the past would certainly have had a positive effect, and that would encourage the people to stay "on offense." For the Jewish people to remember how God had divided the Red Sea to save them from the Egyptian armies, and to remember how God had delivered Judah from 185,000 Assyrian troops in Hezekiah's day – remembering all the battles that God won for Israel would certainly encourage them.

In the same way, as we remember what God has done for us, we will be encouraged to fight- to stay "on offense." Have you seen God do anything big in your life in the past? Remember that event! We can all remember how great and awesome God was in the way He saved us. Never forget that - it will keep us fighting on the offensive line!

d. Nehemiah challenged them to fight for their families.

This strategy would also keep the people on the offensive. He knew that when they were fighting for their families, they would fight harder. In the same way, we need to fight for the spiritual well being of our families. There's no doubt that the enemy is out to destroy the family. The family structure is constantly attacked and torn down in the media. We need to fight for our families, and to support ministries that uphold the family. The more we realize this, the more we'll be on the offensive. Offensive warfare defeats Satan.

## Practical Application

**Be more than "experts" in spiritual wall building – be leaders!**

What's the difference between an expert and a leader? An expert can diagnose the situation, tell you what the problems are, and what needs to be fixed. But a leader knows what the problems are, and knows what to do about them - but then he does it!

Nehemiah was a leader. Not only did he motivate the people with his infectious optimism, but he could also size up the problem areas to see what needed to be done. And then he went out and did it!

Look, for example, at how **Nehemiah worked with families**. He knew that family unity was very important. If the families didn't stay together, Operation Wall would come to a standstill. Nehemiah realized that. He recognized the problem and how to deal with it, and he certainly could have written it up in a diagnostic report. He was an **expert**. But Nehemiah was more than an expert. Besides diagnosing the problem, he did something about it. He was a **leader**.

We've already seen that the men who volunteered to rebuild the wall near their homes would be more responsible in their work. Nehemiah recognized that they would be supported and helped by their families. He realized the potential strength, and he followed through. He assigned the men to work with their families.

Then he stationed the armed guards according to families (v13), because he knew they would fight better in family units. He also realized that family units would be strengthened if they had to fight together. When a family unit pulls together to fight a common enemy, they don't fight each other! On top of all this, Nehemiah challenged the fathers, the heads of the households, to fight for their families - for their sons, their daughters, and their wives (v14).

Nehemiah was more than an expert. He not only knew what needed to be done - he followed through and carried it out. We too are called to be more than experts. Let's not just know what the problem is - let's deal with it!

Let's continue this application to the spiritual walls in our family. Most of us are "family experts." We know what the problems are, and what most likely needs to be done to go about repairing the family's spiritual wall - but most of us don't do much about it. We're too busy, or too lazy. We need to be leaders.

Newlyweds - start now to have family devotions together, even before you have children. Husbands and wives - model the Ephesians 5 love relationship between Christ and His Church. Fathers - take the responsibility for family spiritual leadership. Mothers - teach your children the Word, and support this leadership role in the father. Single parent families - do everything you can to model and teach God's love to your children, and teach them the biblical model for families.

We know all these things, but we need to **do** them! We need to be **more than experts** in spiritual wall building - **we need to be leaders**.