

Defending and Depending

Nehemiah 4:16-20

Nehemiah 4:16-20 - *“So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. ¹⁷ Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. ¹⁸ Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. ¹⁹ Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.”*

Background Notes

The year was about 445BC. The wall around Jerusalem, destroyed in 586BC by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies, was finally being rebuilt. Nehemiah, a dynamic spiritual leader, was spearheading the project. The wall was going up. In fact, early in chapter 4 the wall was half completed.

But opposition to the wall building arose from the surrounding provinces. Pressure was coming in from all four sides – the Samaritans from the north, the Ammonites from the east, the Arabs from the south, and the Ashdodites from the west.

A major attack by these enemies had been called off, however, because the conspiracy was exposed, and Nehemiah had set up a guard at all the vulnerable places at the wall. Furthermore, God had intervened and frustrated the enemy's plans. Verse 15: *“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.”*

Picking up the account in verse 16, we see that from this time forward, Nehemiah's continuing strategy was two-fold: build the wall, and protect the wall. The basic plan was that half of the people would work on the wall and half of the people would be armed and stand guard to protect the wall and the builders.

Furthermore, notice that the workers on the wall themselves had their weapons close at hand while they worked (v17-18). Whether they were laying stone blocks or carrying materials, they would be ready to fight if the enemy attacked.

In addition, Nehemiah organized an early warning system. Verse 18: *“And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.”* The trumpeter was with Nehemiah at all times. When Nehemiah spotted trouble as he made his rounds on the

wall, he could order the trumpet to be sounded from any place. At the sound of the trumpet, everyone was to rally to that point, ready to fight.

This “trumpet,” by the way, was not a modern trumpet. It was a ram’s horn trumpet, called a *shofar*. And it’s not easy to blow. On one of our Holy Land study tours, I tried blowing a *shofar* on the top of the ruins of Old Testament Jericho. Even though I used to play the trumpet, I had a hard time getting any sound from that *shofar*!

Doctrinal Points

1. Spiritual wall building involves protecting what is already built.

God doesn’t want us just to be Christians. He wants us to be **strong** Christians - Christians who have a strong testimony. God doesn’t want to just see Christian families. He wants to see **strong** Christian families - Christ-centered families, families that have a Christ-focused testimony. God doesn’t want to just see churches. He wants to see **strong** vibrant Christian churches – churches that can defend the faith, that have a great reputation and testimony in the neighborhood.

Here we see Nehemiah not only continuing to build, but protecting what was already built. This pictures our responsibility to protect the spiritual walls that we’ve already built, and the walls that we’re continuing to build.

Let’s look once again at Ephesians 6. We’ve looked at this passage in previous Talks. As you know, the enemy of our souls is trying to stop us from building strong spiritual walls, and he wants to weaken and break down what is already built. Ephesians 6 describes the spiritual armor we are to put on for protection in spiritual warfare. We’ve got to put on the armor so we can protect the spiritual walls that are already built.

When we read this Ephesians 6 passage, we usually think of putting on the armor individually. That’s certainly a good application, because each one of us needs to put on these pieces of spiritual armor. But remember, the letter was written to the local church at Ephesus, and in it the apostle Paul told the believers - **together** - to put on the armor of God. As we read this chapter, let’s think of putting on the armor as a church, as a fellowship group, as a family, or as a ministry.

As I read, I’ll add the word “together” in various places - to emphasize that it’s written, in the context, for the church as a whole. Ephesians 6:10-18: *“Finally, my brethren, [together] be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ [Together] put on the whole armor of God, that [together] you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore [together] take up the whole armor of God, that [together] you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

¹⁴ Stand therefore [together], having [together] girded your waist with truth, having [together] put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having [together] shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, [together]

taking the shield of faith with which you [together] will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And [together] take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 [together] praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, together being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

Let's individually, as well as together, put on the entire spiritual armor so that we'll be able to protect the spiritual walls that are being built in our own lives, in our family's lives, in our church lives, and in our fellowship lives.

2. Being organized in spiritual warfare honors God.

Notice - Nehemiah was highly organized in his defense of Jerusalem. They had a plan for defense, and a warning system that could be put into effect at a moment's notice. That's **organization and coordination**.

Being organized didn't mean that they weren't trusting God. Look at verse 20: *"our God will fight for us."* But God's Word is teaching us that being organized and working together in spiritual warfare honors God. It's not detracting from the glory of God!

For example, take the awful problem of abortion. Certainly the wall has been - and continues to be - torn down in that area. The Bible's position against abortion is attacked from all sides. We need to support movements and ministries that are already organized - and are being organized - to fight this appalling practice. We need to protect any remaining area of the wall against abortion, and we need to build up new areas of that wall. This honors God.

Recently I read about a group of Christians who, in order to get organized on this issue, purchased an abortion clinic - and are now turning it into a crisis pregnancy center! That's organized resistance. That's organized spiritual warfare. And that honors God!

So if you have the opportunity to get involved in supporting a crisis pregnancy center, do so. Support it, because being organized in spiritual warfare honors God. That's just one example - there are many more applications we could give on that doctrinal point.

Practical Application

Everyone should study some Christian Evidences.

That application is certainly brought out in this Scripture about protecting the wall. 1 Peter 3:15 says, *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you the hope that is within you, with meekness and fear."*

The phrase, “make a defense,” or “give an answer,” is the word from which we get “apologetics.” **“Apologetics,” by definition, is defending the Christian faith.**

“Christian Evidences” is practical apologetics. It’s the study of the wide variety of evidences that are available to show that Christianity is credible. So everyone should study at least some Christian Evidences! The Bible teaches that we should defend the faith, and we see that illustrated here. They were defending and protecting the wall that was already built.

Being able to defend the faith, to give answers to people who ask questions about “the hope that’s within you” - that’s part of our responsibility in protecting the spiritual walls.

As most of you know, I teach a college course in Christian Evidences, and those lectures have been recorded. You can purchase them on CDs, or listen (free of charge) on the Growing Christians Ministries website.

Many years ago I started studying Christian Evidences on my own. The study of evidences for the Christian faith not only enabled me to better defend the faith myself, but I found that it really bolstered my own personal faith. I was built up and strengthened in the faith! So we have a responsibility not only to build walls, but also to protect those walls. And part of the responsibility of protecting walls would certainly be becoming more familiar with answers you can give to defend the faith. The study of Christian Evidences is very important.

Read 1 Peter 3:15 once again, and notice the **command** there. We are commanded to get ready (by studying Christian Evidences!) so we know how to answer people! *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”*

Everyone should study some Christian Evidences!