

It Can Be Done!

Nehemiah 6:15-19

Nehemiah 6:15-19 - *“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God.*

¹⁷ Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. ¹⁹ Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.”

Background Notes

The new wall around the city of Jerusalem was finished in just fifty-two days - less than two months! That was a tremendous accomplishment. The Babylonian armies destroyed the ancient city wall when they defeated and overran Jerusalem, and took the people of Judah into captivity in the 6th century BC. When the Jews returned from their 70-year exile in Babylon they rebuilt the Temple, but the city walls remained in ruins. So the city was weak and defenseless until Nehemiah came on the scene in the 5th century BC.

Strengthened by the Lord, Nehemiah motivated the people to rise up and rebuild the city wall. It took a lot of hard work. Many obstacles and opposition had to be overcome. In addition, doubt, discouragement, and strife within the ranks had to be overcome. But under Nehemiah's godly leadership, the people continued to build, and the job was completed in the Hebrew month Elul (August/September), in about 445BC.

Tobiah, the Ammonite enemy (Ammon is modern-day Jordan), was still giving Nehemiah trouble (v17-19). In fact, he had made inroads into Judah through marriage. When we get to chapter 13, we'll see that intermarriage was no small problem.

Incidentally, I recently read a report in an archaeological journal that inscriptions that were recently discovered in Jordan have documented "Tobiah." We've mentioned that inscriptions mentioning the name "Sanballat," and inscriptions containing the name "Geshem" the Arab have been found. Now inscriptions about a "Tobiah dynasty" were discovered about five miles from Amman, the capital city of Jordan. Most likely the "Tobiah" mentioned in Nehemiah was one of the early rulers in this dynasty.

Doctrinal Points

1. It is possible to build strong walls.

We've mentioned a number of times that the physical wall building in the book of Nehemiah is a picture of spiritual wall building for us today. God wants us to have Christian testimonies that are like strong walls. Not crumbling sandcastles, but strong and sturdy walls that will provide protection from the enemy's attacks. God wants to see strong and stable Christian individuals, families, and churches.

It's not easy to build strong spiritual walls, but it can be done - and it doesn't have to take a long time! Although building strong walls and guarding the walls are lifelong tasks, it's possible to build strong walls in a reasonable length of time.

Some of my students come to our Bible college with no Bible background or Christian upbringing. In fact, a couple of students were saved in prison. It's truly amazing to see what God can do in one or two years of dedicated Bible study and commitment to grow spiritually. With dedication and some hard work, strong walls can be built!

So don't be discouraged. The Bible teaches that it is possible for you to build strong spiritual walls!

2. Strong spiritual walls affect the enemy camp.

Verse 16 says that the enemies were disheartened. When they saw that the wall was completed, they lost their confidence. You might think that building strong walls or Christian testimony only stirs up opposition from the enemy. Yes, it does do that - but it also brings about loss of confidence.

It's interesting that some unbelieving scientists who hold to the theory of evolution are no longer willing to debate scientists who are Christians, who hold to special creation. Why? They've lost their confidence. They've become disheartened because creationists are building strong spiritual walls. Creationists are no longer like uneducated rustics who are unable to defend the faith. They have a strong Christian testimony. They are well educated, and are building a strong wall of evidence for creation. They can defend the faith. They know their Bible and their science. The "enemy" has lost its confidence.

Strong spiritual walls really do affect the enemy camp!

Notice, too, that Nehemiah's enemies recognized that the work of building the wall was backed by God (v16). Psalm 126 was written after the people returned from captivity. Psalm 126 1-3: *"When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'*
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad."

When Israel came back from their Babylonian captivity, the surrounding nations knew that God was working on their behalf. They saw that the wall of Jerusalem that had gone up, despite all the opposition. No way could a wall like that be built in 52 days without God's help! The enemy realized that God was with the people of Judah. In the same way, as we build strong walls in our lives today, the enemy of the faith realizes that this is more than natural. God is at work, helping us build strong spiritual walls!

As a new Christian, while he was still in prison, Chuck Colson built some strong spiritual walls in his own life. And then he also built a strong and very successful prison ministry - in a relatively short time. Even the skeptics had to admit that this feat was not normal or natural. Over the years they have tried to explain it in a lot of different ways, but many of them have had to admit that it was supernatural. The changes were the work of God. Strong spiritual walls really do affect the enemy camp!

3. Mixed marriages will lead to compromise.

Verse 18 reveals that Tobiah, the enemy, was able to infiltrate and become like a "fifth column," or subversive agent, in Judah. How did this happen? It was accomplished through marriage. Tobiah had married a Jewish woman, and his son also married a Jew. (That would be like a man from a very prominent family in today's Jordan marrying a Jewish Israeli woman.) In Deuteronomy 23:3-4, God said that Jewish women were not to marry Ammonite men. So according to Jewish law, these marriages were wrong.

That infiltration opened up the potential for security risks and leaks. And sure enough, the mixed marriages here led to compromise. The nobles in Judah began singing Tobiah's praises – even though he was still an enemy! He was still writing threatening letters to Nehemiah (v19).

Mixed marriages will always lead to compromise. 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "*Don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" A committed believer can't be married to an unbeliever without some kind of compromise taking place. It's not only unbiblical - it just won't work out well. It's not always easy for two believers to stay fully committed to the work of the Lord in a Christian marriage. Mixed marriages will always lead to some form of compromise.

Practical Applications

1. Never say "It can't be done!"

When the people of Jerusalem started to rebuild the wall, the job seemed impossible. It's quite likely that many people predicted that the job would never be done - yet in fifty-two days the wall was completed!

Spiritual wall building is like that too. At first it looks like an overwhelming job - so much to do, so much to learn, so much rubbish to clear away out of our lives. The key is to just get started – and then continue to build, one step at a time.

Here's an illustration. I always wanted to write a book for the glory of God, but I thought I never could because it's such a big project. Well, as many of you know, I've written two books now. The key was to write one small section at a time. The two books I've written are actually compilations of the Devotions for Growing Christians that I write six times a year – one page at a time.

Some of you have never read the Bible through yet because it's such a long book, and it seems like such a big project. Well, just get started - and then keep on going! Read some every day, and you'll be done before you realize it.

God may be calling you or your church to start a new ministry – maybe a wall-building ministry. Don't say "It can't be done." The job may look large, but just start working in a small way right now, and see what God can do in a relatively short period of time. Never say "It can't be done!"

2. Expect to feel betrayed in the work of the Lord.

How do you think Nehemiah felt when the disloyal Jews started praising Tobiah? Nehemiah had gone all out and completed a great work of the Lord – the completion of the city wall - and yet some of the key people started singing the praises of the enemy. This happens in the work of the Lord.

I want you to notice the way we phrased the title of this application: "Expect to **feel** betrayed in the work of the Lord." Not expect to **be** betrayed, although that may happen. There may be times when you really are betrayed, but most likely it's something discouraging, like the situation here. These nobles were not out to deliberately betray Nehemiah. They were probably glad that the wall was built. But it seemed to them that compromising with Tobiah was the better way to go here. They were wrong.

Although it's possible that you will be betrayed, at times you **feel betrayed**. When you're working hard in ministry, it's discouraging when people don't support you - just as Nehemiah felt when the nobles of Judah undermined him, and supported Tobiah. You probably felt betrayed if a decision at your church didn't go the way you believed was right (and you many have been right!). Everyone seemed to be against you. But even if you were right, and the wrong decision was made, don't become discouraged. Don't quit! React like Nehemiah - even if you feel betrayed.

Nehemiah didn't quit. He didn't allow this negative event to get him down. No, he continued on for twelve more years longer in Jerusalem, doing what he could to lead and encourage the people of God. So even if feel betrayed at times - **don't quit!** Continue to encourage and build up the people of God!