

Watch Those Gates

Nehemiah 7:1-4

Nehemiah 7:1-4 - *“Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.*

³And I said to them, “Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house.” ⁴ Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt.”

Background Notes

The events of the book of Nehemiah come in the 5th century BC, near the close of Old Testament history. Long gone were the days of glory under King David and King Solomon. As you know, because they departed from worshiping God, and turned away into idolatry and immorality, God permitted the people of Israel to be taken away into exile.

In 586BC, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the beautiful Temple, and took the remaining people captive to Babylon. The Jews were exiled there for 70 years. Eventually the Babylonian Empire was overthrown, and the Persian Empire took over. Under the Persian emperor Cyrus, the Jews were permitted to go back to their homeland, and about 50,000 of them returned to Jerusalem in 538BC.

Under the motivating ministries of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, the Temple was finally completed in 516BC. Their rebuilt Temple didn't even begin to compare with the glory of Solomon's Temple. "Zerubbabel's Temple," or the "Second Temple," was but a shack compared to Solomon's Temple! But God was pleased, because the hearts of the people were turned towards Him.

However, the wall around the city remained in ruins. In fact, the wall around Jerusalem remained in ruins for about 100 years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed overran and destroyed the city. In those days, a city without a wall was not a strong city. It was weak and defenseless. And God wanted a strong wall around the city of His Temple.

That's where Nehemiah, a Jewish cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes I, came into the picture. God stirred his heart to rally the people of Jerusalem and challenge them to get the city walls rebuilt. And the wall was completed in just 52 days – an amazing feat! That's what Nehemiah chapters 1-6 were all about.

In chapter 7 we see a great time of blessing and revival, and the continued activity of the people during this time of revival.

Doctrinal Point

1. Growing Christians need to continually watch out for the enemy.

Nehemiah appointed gatekeepers (v1) and guards (v3) to keep watch on the city wall. The guards were to watch out for the enemy, so that the enemy couldn't breach the wall, get into the city, and tear that wall down again.

In order to appreciate the lessons that come from Nehemiah 7:1-3, we need to recognize that **the Bible contains important truth lessons in picture form**. Many of the events that are recorded in Scripture are spiritual pictures. The book of Nehemiah is not just an account of the physical wall building by the Jews in the 5th century BC. No. God made sure that the book of Nehemiah was included in the Bible – so it's the Word of God to us today!

The book of Nehemiah is the record of the literal wall that went up around Jerusalem in the 5th century BC, but it contains spiritual lessons for us. The principles of wall building that we find in Nehemiah can be applied to us today - for spiritual wall building in the lives of individual Christians, or Christian families, or entire churches.

We are to be involved in spiritual wall building. Spiritual wall building has to do with becoming strong Christians. Spiritual wall building has to do with Christians who know the Word, so they don't get caught off guard and capitulate to the enemy. Spiritual wall building has to do being able to defend the faith. There are too many Christians today who can't defend the faith. They don't have strong walls. They capitulate to the enemy.

So God wants to see strong spiritual walls in the lives of believers - and it is possible for us to build strong walls. The very fact that Jerusalem's wall was completed in fifty-two days is God's Word teaching us, in picture form, that it is possible to build strong walls in our Christian lives. And when you get involved in spiritual wall building, it's amazing what you can do - if you set your mind to it!

Now comes the lesson of Nehemiah 7: we've got to guard those walls. We've got to take good care of those rebuilt walls. Satan, the enemy of our souls, is prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). We can be sure Satan is out there prowling around, looking for areas where he can break down our walls.

In the days of walled cities, the most important places to strongly fortify the walls were the gate areas. Why? Because that's where the enemy would most likely try to break through the wall. Archaeologists have uncovered walled cities from Old Testament days, and they have discovered "double chambered gates" and "triple chambered gates." These types of gates could be fortified quickly in case of attack, because the people knew that the gates were the most vulnerable area of the city walls.

So, while you may have a strong spiritual wall, you need to watch the gate areas. It's especially important to guard the gate areas. The enemy would love to get a foot in the door and begin to break down our walls. Gates are where we have to be especially watchful, because the gate areas represent the areas in our lives where we're vulnerable to enemy attack. Doctrine could be a gate area. Maybe we're careless about who we choose to shape our doctrine. Guarding that gate would mean we read or listen only to reliable Bible teachers. Maybe our weak gate could be in a moral area. Maybe we're vulnerable in the areas of petty theft from our workplace, or to online pornography. We all need to identify and greatly fortify the gate areas that are susceptible to enemy attack.

In spiritual wall building we may come to the point where we have strong spiritual walls. We're solid stable Christians. But even strong and stable Christians must constantly keep watch and guard those gate areas. Growing Christians need to continually watch out for the enemy, because all of us are vulnerable to enemy attack

2. Growing Christians should also be “singers” and “Levites.”

Now that the wall was rebuilt and the revival had begun, Nehemiah appointed singers and Levites, as well as guards! This, too, is part of the spiritual picture.

As Christians we not only want to have strong walls, but we must maintain those strong walls. One way to keep our testimony strong is to be gatekeepers, watching where the enemy may attack. But another important defense for our walls is worship!

Notice the emphasis on worship, represented by the singers. And the Levites served in the Temple, so we see an emphasis on service for the Lord as represented by the Levites. I believe God's Word is teaching us here that **strong Christians need to be continually involved in watching, in worship, and in service.**

Practical Applications

1. Let's never “rest on our laurels!”

No Christian or church should ever get to the point where they think they have “arrived.” We won't reach a sinless state in this earthly life. So we need to stay active in watching our vulnerable areas. We need to stay active in worship, and active in work or service.

Do you have a balanced Christian life? Do you have an emphasis on watching the gate areas, and in worship and service as well? This should be true of our churches as well as individual believers. It's great to see a local church where there is an emphasis on all three – a careful watch for the areas where the enemy may make inroads, a good healthy emphasis on worship, and active involvement in service for the Lord.

2. Let's especially watch our "gate areas."

We've mentioned before that "gate areas" picture the vulnerable areas in our lives as believers. They are the areas where Satan would love to begin to inch his way into our lives – with the goal of knocking down our spiritual walls.

Look at verse 3. The people could use the gates in the daytime, when it was easier to watch who wanted to enter - but they were not to open the gates at night. *"Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors."* So there is a place for using our gate areas, but we've got to be watchful for when to allow open gates in our spiritual walls, and what we allow to enter.

I'd like to emphasize that gate areas are **not necessarily areas of evil in themselves!** They are areas where we're especially vulnerable to temptation by the enemy. Material things would be an example. There's nothing evil about material things. In fact, 1 Timothy 6:17 says that God freely gives us all things to enjoy! But you know as well as I do that love for our possessions can be a gate area. We can get hung up on our things - our homes, our furniture, our landscapes, our clothes, our vehicles – and on and on! We can become materialists (Mark 4:18-19). Satan has definitely made inroads through that gate in the lives of many American Christians.

TV or the internet could be another gate area. There's nothing intrinsically evil about either TV or the internet - but they can be gate areas where we may be especially vulnerable to Satan's attack. We need to regulate the amount of time we spend, and the kinds of things we watch or consume. We need to be aware and in control.

Sports would be another example. There's nothing wrong with sports, but that's an area where I've always been vulnerable - because I love sports! A few years ago I got too involved with golf – and I was spending an inordinate amount of time playing golf. For me, golf was a gate area, and Satan was starting to get a foot in my wall. I had to step back and set a guard by becoming more disciplined in that area.

So the gate areas emphasize where we're vulnerable - where the enemy can more easily attack and get in through our walls. And it's not necessarily an area of moral evil. It's an area where we may be vulnerable to attack.

We need to watch those gate areas!