

# “REBUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM”

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**J**UST as we look forward to the attendance at a convention of the Lord's people, we can be sure the Israelite indeed looked forward to going up to Jerusalem which was the center of all that the Jewish people held dear to their hearts in the things that were really worth while. It represented to them the meeting place of themselves as a race, where the religious rites and ceremonies of the worship of the true God took place; it was their pride and glory and even when the location was desolate and they were captives in Babylon, it lost none of its glamour to the Jew who still looked for the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises and the coming Messiah.

We are not treating our lesson today from the standpoint of a type or shadow; being fully aware that there is a temptation, as we see the beautiful types in the “Tabernacle Shadows” and elsewhere which are fully authorized in the Scriptures, to make a type of every Biblical character and incident. The practice of making types not specifically justified by the Scriptures is very apt to lead one far astray, and often leads to the position of “judging” our contemporaries.

On the other hand many incidents and characters may be used for our edification and upbuilding, to illustrate principles as we compare our experiences and our relationship to the Lord with those of the Bible characters which we may consider. It is from this standpoint that we consider the lesson of today.

In principle the Lord's truth, His dealings with His people, and His attitude toward sin and unrighteousness, while having special application at specific times, do not change; for He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

## **Target of the Ages**

Cities of old were often besieged but Jerusalem probably has been the object of attack, or has been taken, more than any other city of history. The city itself was demolished at least twice; the Temple was desecrated and used for heathen worship, and was destroyed by fire; the walls were attacked with battering rams, and sections were completely torn to the ground; the gates of the city were burned; and in spite of all this, the city means so much to zealous Jews that they would again take up the task of rebuilding their beloved and Holy City.

It is with this rebuilding under the leadership of Nehemiah, as recorded in the book of Nehemiah, that our lesson today deals. In the comments in the “Bible Students” Bible will be found an application of 13 chapters of Nehemiah, but we believe that many other perhaps more personal applications may be made that will be interesting, as well as helpful to us in appreciating the Lord's care and guidance of His people.

We suggest briefly several applications, in order that as we proceed with the lesson you may readily make appropriate applications in connection with your individual experiences in the pilgrim way.

## **Lessons for All**

First, let us keep in mind the glory of the city, its attacks, destruction, downfall, rebuilding, and renewed glorious state. Likewise the human race, representatively in Adam and Eve in the garden of paradise, was once in its perfection; but under the temptation they succumbed, and have travelled the downward way. Perfection of life after the Millennial Age will be more glorious and on a grander scale than anything preceding it.

Secondly, as we view the Israelites. Enjoying the favor and blessing of God, note they fell prey to the attacks of the enemy and are a scattered and broken people. But they will be restored to favor, and covenant relationship with the Lord.

Thirdly, we see how perfection gave way to temptation in connection with the Church. Established in purity and righteousness, it gradually became contaminated with error and sin; but from time to time the scattered true sheep of the Lord were reunited; and eventually, in the glory of the spiritual Kingdom, the faithful ones will be surrounded with the light and glory of the Lord forevermore.

The individual Christian's experiences are also shown, in that first he must recognize his sinful condition, his need of a redeemer, and that through the means provided he can come into the relationship of a son and child of the Lord. Likewise, the fall and rise of various stages and parts of the Church all through the age — during the Reformation, and in our own time — are very fittingly illustrated.

Before proceeding to a more detailed consideration of the Biblical account, we should like to give an illustration of such an application during the Reformation period, which also carries certain interesting chronological data worthy of mention here. Thirteen years prior to Nehemiah's efforts Ezra attempted a similar work, but was relatively unsuccessful in attaining the full objective. The dates given here, like other historical and Biblical dates, are not agreed upon by all commentators; but for our purpose this is not a vital consideration.

### **A Seeming Parallel**

The commission to rebuild the city was given Nehemiah in 454 B.C. from whence we date the seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy, a period of 490 years, ending in 36 A.D. Daniel's prophecy foretold the coming of the Messiah and His cutting off. It also revealed that actual justification would be possible through His blood, as contrasted with the typical justification by the blood of bulls and goats. Inasmuch as 1881 A.D. parallels 36 A.D., and dating back 490 years from 1881 to get the corresponding date 490 years prior to 36 A.D., we come to 1391 A.D.—the time when Huss continued the work begun by Wycliffe, and Nehemiah would represent Huss. Regarding Wycliffe's experience, we find some very interesting comments; namely that Wycliffe's spiritual earnestness was shocked by the spectacle of two popes, each claiming to be the sole head of the Church, each labelling the other as antichrist. (How convenient!)

To Wycliffe the year of the great schism, 1378 A.D., was the crucial year of his life. (When one's faith receives such a shock it is indeed a crisis.) He first urged that both popes should be set aside, as having little in common with the Church of the holy God. From this position of neutrality he quickly passed into one of antagonism to Papacy itself. Wycliffe began in earnest the translation of the Bible into English, and soon took the next decisive step by an open attack (forced upon him by his studies of the Bible) against transubstantiation; and afterwards in nearly all of his writings, he introduced in some way his views upon this subject.

Doubtless, Wycliffe considered the Papacy to have been the "Lord's organization," and it was no doubt a very serious experience in his life when he was forced to conclude that such could not be the case. The test, however, rather than driving him away from the Lord, was but the means of lifting him higher, step by step, and nearer to the Lord.

Before going specifically into the account in Nehemiah we also would like to call attention to what we shall consider to be our "golden texts." In chapter 4, verse 14, we read: "Be not afraid, remember the Lord." What a precious thought is contained here for us! Also in 9:17: "THOU art a GOD ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." What comforting words of assurance! And in 9:19, "To give light in the way that we should go." If we get nothing more from this lesson, these three texts are well worth our time and study.

## **Nehemiah's Story Applied**

Now, proceeding to the Nehemiah account; in Chapter One, we see that the first essential, before Nehemiah can do anything, is for him to recognize that the city is desolate, that the walls are broken down, that the gates have been burned; that there is only a remnant of the people remaining, and that they are in great affliction and reproach.

In making application, we see that the first essential is for us to recognize our undone condition —as individuals, and as the Lord's people in general — and then we can, as Nehemiah did, pray to the Lord that He may open the way that his prayers were heard. When we recognize weakness and shortcomings, when we see our structure of truth being attacked and broken down, let us "take it to the Lord in prayer; in His arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there."

Note the elements in Nehemiah's prayer; acknowledgment of God, confession of sins and shortcomings, and claiming God's promises.

In the 2nd chapter Nehemiah determines to rebuild the city, with God's help, and takes advantage of all the helps the Lord promises by the hand of the king.

Chapter 3 relates how all the Jews at Jerusalem had a part in rebuilding, thus illustrating the need of every member in the body of Christ and how individually we need all of the fruits and graces of the spirit to transform ourselves into the image and likeness of our Master.

Attacks from without are illustrated in the 4th chapter and attacks from within in the 5th chapter. Temptations in the guise of reasonableness and moderation, and various stratagems of the adversary, to deceive if possible the very elect, are pictured in chapter 6.

The successful accomplishment of rebuilding the walls in the incredibly short time of 52 days, recorded in chapter 7, may represent our growth, attainments, spiritual progress, freedom, and review of restoration of covenant relationship with the Lord, and reassurances of the truth. The necessity of studying the Lord's Word reverentially and with appreciation thereof, is emphasized in chapter 8.

Chapter 9 is an outstanding one, in that it recounts the leadings and mercy of the Lord. Let us learn to count our blessings, name them one by one, and see what great things the Lord hath done. Read this chapter, and experience how the Lord's Word draws you closer to Him.

Chapter 10, verses 28 to 31 and 35 emphasizes and renews our consecration to the Lord and covenant relationship with Him. And in chapter 11 the placement or allocation of various classes and families fitly illustrates our proper estimation of other members of the Body and the various fruits and graces of the spirit.

Thankfulness to God in everything, and joyful acknowledgment of His goodness, is the lesson in chapter 12. And, last but not least, chapter 13 shows the importance of constant diligence and vigilance in maintaining the progress already made, in keeping old sins and habits from gaining supremacy. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life," is the lesson.