
EZRA AND NEHEMIAH REBUILD A WALL

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The captivity was long and hard. For 70 years God's people had suffered in a strange land under the heel of cruel Babylon as recompense for their sin. Now Persia conquers Babylon, and God commands the new king, Cyrus the Great, to free the captives, return them to Jerusalem, and help them rebuild the city.

In those days, any respectable city was surrounded by a wall, and of course the first thing a conqueror did was tear down the wall. That's what had happened to the wall around Jerusalem as the once-prominent city lost the symbol of its power and greatness. It fell to two of the returned captives, Ezra the scribe and priest, and Nehemiah, the civil administrator and builder, to restore, not only the physical walls, but also the temple, or spiritual wall of the city and its people.

The spiritual rebuilding began some years earlier with the discovery by Hilkiah the priest of "the book of the law in the house of God" (2 Chron. 34:14). A temporary "revival" ensued, but was soon swept away as the perfidious religious establishment refused to face the gross sinfulness of the people. But the word of God (then, the first 5 books of our Bible) remained for Ezra and Nehemiah to interpret and use.

As they began rebuilding they faced many obstacles including damaging falsehoods concerning the intent of the rebuilders, fake attempts to create unity of purpose, threats of direct military intervention, and charges that they were rebellious traitors attempting to undermine the king's power. Following the exchange of several letters, King Darius issued a decree reaffirming the original statement by Cyrus that this work was ordained by God and should proceed until finished. The work was finally finished by Ezra, whom Scripture says had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:10).

Today it seems as if the "walls" of America could use a bit of rebuilding. Those attempting this daunting task face somewhat the same threats as Ezra and Nehemiah did. Much of our political establishment pays only lip service to rebuilding our sagging walls since they use these same dysfunctions to maintain political power. Neither do the powers of finance and economics want our walls rebuilt because they profit immensely from the oppressive and corrupt structures they have created to transfer money from the millions at the bottom of the income pyramid to the few at the top.

Isaiah states our problem succinctly: Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive decrees; to deprive the needy from justice, and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! (Isa. 10:1-2).

Since the problem of broken-down walls and dysfunctional systems comes from God as his penalty for national sin, it is perhaps fitting that we begin our wall-building with the religious establishment. It, too, has suffered some gaps in its walls, namely the steady transference of attention from national to personal sin issues; the widespread failure to "speak truth to power"; to avoid inflaming issues that dearly need to be exposed to the light of God's word; and the widespread substitution of "cheap grace" and the "feel-good gospel" for the clear, demanding voice of God.

As you endure the political chicanery now transpiring every day, think about how wonderful it would be if some interviewer would ask certain candidates this question: "You profess to be a Bible believing Christian. How then can you support policies and legislation that are the direct antithesis of what Jesus taught about loving our neighbors and caring for the needy?"

If we got some honest answers to questions demanding candidates to tell the truth, even if that would cost them some of their fat-cat supporters, then we would be on the way to begin rebuilding the now-shattered walls of our great nation.