

Nehemiah: A Motivator for the People

Key Verse: *“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”*
—Nehemiah 2:18

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 2

FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER

the return of Ezra to Jerusalem, Nehemiah led a company of men and restored the walls and the civil authority. This book is a record of those events that took place over a period of eleven years. It is an historical book, supervised by Divine providence and intended for the instruction and edification of God’s people. Many good instances of individual faith acting upon the written Word are recorded in its verses.

Though the book of Nehemiah is mainly historical in nature, it depicts the story of the renewal of the people of the nation of Israel. Chapter 1 for example, represents conviction and confession of their sins; our theme scripture from Chapter 2 includes the sincere determination to rebuild; Chapter 3 deals with the actual rebuilding of the defense through sanctification (setting apart); and the remaining chapters

cover attack from without; temptations from the Adversary that are sometimes disguised; confession of our weaknesses; the importance of a covenant relationship with God; making attempts to live a godly life; acknowledgement of God in everything and the renewed influence of the Spirit of God.

Nehemiah was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah. He was of one of those prominent families of the Babylonian captivity that had returned to Palestine under Cyrus' decree. (Ezra 6:1-3) Nehemiah occupied a confidential position with Artaxerxes, the Persian king. During this time, the Jews had become considerable in number, and were despised by their neighbors, who wished to drive them out of the land. Their enemies, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the king who reigned over them, had attacked the partially rebuilt walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem, and had even wrecked and burned it. A plot had been devised for the complete extermination of the Israelites that would have succeeded if it had not been for Divine intervention. (Esther 3:13) When Nehemiah heard of this news, he was greatly troubled because he had a love for the land of promise. "It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. 1:4) He prayed in this manner for four months, until one day his prayer was answered in the way of promises for forgiveness, mercy, and reconciliation with God. (Deut. 30:4) During a meeting with Artaxerxes, the king noted Nehemiah's saddened condition. Nehemiah used this opportunity to petition the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild all that was destroyed. (Neh. 2:3-7) He could have been put to death for this, but instead the king supplied him with all that he requested.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah got right to work on his appointed task. As an evidence that their hearts were in their work, the entire wall was reared up in fifty-two days. ■