

Nehemiah and the Lord's recent word, 1 of 3 –18maart2023

Hi all,

In last month's e-newsletter I shared one of the things the Lord spoke to me concerning 2023, in part:

“Strengthen what remains...Strengthen what you have...For many, this will be a year involving a course correction...”

Nehemiah's experience repairing and rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem is similar to what the Lord said to me for this year. Strengthen what remains, and a change of direction.

Nehemiah - and a little history first

When Solomon died the nation of Israel split into 2 nations. The northern nation was known as Israel, and it was mostly 10 tribes who made Samaria their capital. They are called 'the northern kingdom'. They made their own temple and priesthood in Samaria which is north of Jerusalem, and most of their kings were evil.

In 722BC Assyria conquered Israel/Samaria and captured most of the population, resettling them in other nations under Assyria's control. Then they brought other people from those nations into Samaria and settled them there.

Over the decades the remaining Jewish population inter-married with the gentile refugees that Assyria had settled in the land, leading to half-breed Jewish people generally called 'the Samaritans'. They were very much hated by the 'pure blood Jews', and would not even talk to them. (II Kings 17:5-18, 24; John 4:9)

The southern kingdom was known as Judah and consisted of 2 main tribes, Judah and Benjamin. There were also the Levites who served in the temple, and remnants of the tribes of the north who loved God and wanted to worship in the temple following the laws of Moses. Most of Judah's kings were good. But the nation fell away from the Lord, and were conquered by Babylon in 587BC.

Almost there, but just a little bit more history...

Babylon carried away most of the Jewish population to Babylon. Among these captives were Daniel and Ezekiel. Jeremiah had prophesied they would be captive 70 years, 1 year for each of the sabbath years they had refused to keep. (Jeremiah 29:10-14, II Chronicles 36:13-21)

As mentioned above, Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 587BC. The ruler Cyrus decreed in 539BC the temple could be rebuilt, in the well documented, 'Edict of Cyrus'. Zerubbabel then led 50,000 volunteers to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and the temple was finished in 517BC, exactly 70 years from destruction to restoration.

Decades later the walls surrounding Jerusalem were still in disrepair, leaving the temple and city open to attack. Nehemiah was the king's wine bearer, and asked permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall. His request was granted in Nehemiah chapter 2, and the wall was completed in just 52 days; 445BC. (Nehemiah 6:15)

For our lives...

Many have gone through life-changing things in the last 2 years. In some ways it is similar to the ups and downs that Israel and Judah experienced over a much longer time. There were moments of confusion, conflicting prophetic words, prophets of various 'streams' of their faith prophesying opposing things. Friendships were broken, families and friends moved away or had to move due to circumstances - there are many similar things in our day.

Nehemiah wants to return to his roots. He wants to build up the defensive walls of the city. There are people all around him that don't understand what God has done in his heart and what he is trying to do in life. The walled city of Jerusalem represents our own lives. Outside the walls of our life is 'Judah', which are relatives, but not living within our 'city walls'. Those outside our 'walls' must be a lesser priority for us.

It is also in Nehemiah 2 that we learn of 3 men who are important for our study, for they tried to get Nehemiah to stop working on the wall. Their methods are what Satan uses against you and I today. Nehemiah's example provides an example for us concerning some of the things the Lord told me for 2023.

The names of the 3 men are: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.

Sanballat (Sinballat) was governor of Samaria to the north of Jerusalem, and his name means; (the Samaritan god called Sin) "Sin will give you life." Or, "sin has vilified (made you evil)."

Tobiah means 'pleasing to Jehovah', and lived in the area around Jerusalem. He joined Sanballat to try to stop Nehemiah. Geshem lived to the south and east of the city. His name means 'hard rain', used in Israel of the fall and winter rains which can be overwhelming. He is known as "Geshem the Arabian", an Arab chief of those who lived in the area around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was surrounded by those trying to distract him from what the Lord had called him to do. Do you ever feel like that?

Nehemiah was trying to strengthen what remained. The broken wall was still there, but it needed fixed. That's how our lives are quite often, or it feels like that. If you were with Nehemiah you could see the wall, where it was, the foundations in some places was the only thing left.

Nehemiah 2:10 says

"When they heard of it (Nehemiah coming to repair the wall), it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

The first thing to notice is that very often, any change of direction will make some people unhappy. These are people you would think would be happy for you, but they aren't. For personal and selfish reasons, they don't want you to 'rebuild your walls' of protection - they want full access to your life as they have had for some time. They now see you asserting yourself as shutting them out. It wasn't that Nehemiah was shutting them out, but by rebuilding the walls it meant he was setting the terms by which they could have a relationship with him. We need to do that - set the terms with some people rather than them dictating to us the terms of the relationship.

Maybe you are rebuilding your life, changing, and putting up a guard against those who are toxic or just not good for you emotionally and spiritually. But there is protection and provision from the Lord when we set our priorities right, when we wake up and realize we must first be strong within ourselves so that we may give out to others. This is time to strengthen our own 'Jerusalem' and get those walls built.

We will pick it up there next week, until then, blessings,

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Hi all,

We left Nehemiah with the intention of returning to Jerusalem to build up the protective walls of the city. This is a type of you and I strengthening what we have and perhaps for some, building up your 'walls of protection' around your life, is a new direction.

We sometimes see this with pastors and others when a person starts a house church. Sometimes they will caution about being in a cult. Sometimes they ask 'Who is your covering' or something like that, not understanding their New Testament was written by apostles doing church in the home writing to people in home based churches.

When people change direction in life - change churches, change jobs, focus on their marriage or children by dropping distractions in their lives (including some people) - people will offer everything from caution to anger, so today is about when Satan attacks. He is the accuser of the brethren, so it's normal life - you aren't being singled out.

Wisdom when you change direction

But here is how to at least temporarily lessen someone's accusations or anger towards you. Nehemiah 2:10 tells us the main 3 men who stood against the idea of the city walls being rebuilt were 'grieved' when they heard someone was seeking to do so. Until that point in time they could come and go out of the city and work their schemes at will.

That's like people in our lives who come in and out of our lives, often using us for their own schemes. They do so because we have not put up any protective walls around our heart, around our emotions, around our lives.

Step one, discretion

Nehemiah 2:11-16 tells us Nehemiah scouted the city for 3 days, at night so he wouldn't be noticed. He was examining what needed to be done, taking inventory of what remained and made plans to rebuild.

He tells us he did not tell any of the local elders. If you are contemplating a change of direction, or you are rebuilding your life completely or in part, start quietly in your heart taking inventory of what such changes would mean. Nehemiah did this 3 days, which is like the Lord dead in the tomb in preparation for the resurrection. There needs to be a 'quiet time' that is like death of the old as you realize the past is forever in the past.

Nehemiah was planning the walls to be rebuilt and never to be destroyed again. He was planning a good and permanent change to the city. This is how we must be when we strengthen what remains or change things by doing a new thing - we must be all in. We must be committed. We must take inventory and think through the changes our decision will mean to our relationships and life. If you're going to rebuild, rebuild well!

Reveal the plan, and the reaction

Nehemiah writes in 2:17-18 that once he was done examining the walls and had taken inventory of all that was needed, he shared it with the elders of the city. This shows us once we know what we are doing, we just share with the core people in our lives. You aren't ready yet to tell the world, you are just sharing with those in your 'city' of Jerusalem - immediate family, perhaps closest friends. The reaction should be they support you and will help, not hinder you. They are for you.

But Nehemiah reveals in 2:19-20 that Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem 'laughed him to scorn' and then also accused him of being in rebellion against the king: "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

Evidently they didn't know Nehemiah was there under orders of the king, but even if they did, they laughed at him and despised him the text says. That is often what people will do to us.

They will laugh, despise, and accuse. Just get ready for it if you are rebuilding your walls or changing the direction of life by asserting yourself.

If you are angry, depressed, or discouraged, you are living in the past. If you are afraid or worried, you are living in the future. If you are in peace, you are living today for today in the Lord. Find that peace.

Nehemiah answered their accusation in 2:20: "God is with us and we will rebuild. You have no part in what we are doing. You have no right in what we are doing. You have no 'remembrance' in what we are doing." Nehemiah was moving on and they couldn't go where he was going.

Many Christians think they are to be victims

Many read Jesus telling us to offer the other cheek, give the extra coat, walk the extra mile in Matthew 5:39-41 to mean we are to let people take advantage of us, but that is not what He was saying.

What Jesus said places limits on how much we are to offer ourselves, how much we are to give of ourselves, how far we are willing to go for others. We offer 1 cheek, 1 coat, 1 extra mile. We are not to be a victim, not to give away our wardrobe, not beyond 1 mile.

Jesus is saying our responsibility to others has limits.

After we walk that extra mile with a person, they must walk by themselves. We give 1 coat but keep our closet of clothes, for they now have to clothe themselves. We offer 1 cheek but then put a stop to it, for they must deal with their own anger. Let them do that.

Nehemiah answered their accusations. He stood up for himself for he knew what he was doing was God's leading. He didn't ask for forgiveness when they were offended, for he was in the right and they would just have to deal with their emotions.

Nehemiah realized his 3 accusers had no power over him. They no longer had any place in his city. They no longer had the authority to offer their opinion about the city. And they did not like being powerless. Amazingly, these 3 accusers still had their own areas they governed, but it was THAT work that bothered them.

Isn't that the way it is so often? People who accuse you or don't like the direction you're going, have their own full and busy lives to live. But for some reason (often demon inspired) they focus on you to rip you apart - sad, but that is the way of man and Satan.

We conclude next week seeing that once Nehemiah moved on he had a whole new set of friends who joined him in the work, and the wall was completed in 52 days. Until next week, blessings,

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Nehemiah, New friends, 3 of 3 – 1 april2023

Hi all,

The way they rebuilt the wall is so helpful for us today as we change course or rebuild our lives. It is amazing how many helpful things we can learn from Nehemiah.

People joined Nehemiah

Chapter 3 of tells us once others heard what he was doing, they joined with Nehemiah. The whole chapter of Nehemiah 3 lists who is working where and what they did. They worked

side by side, shoulder to shoulder in teamwork with their neighbor. Each person who lived by the wall repaired the part of the wall opposite their house. Each citizen of Jerusalem was responsible for the part of the wall that protected their own home.

This is an important principle, that each person in your 'city' must do their part.

If in this analogy you are the city, then it means you have different parts of your life, emotions, heart, that must be repaired just in that area to which that issue pertains. Work on the part of the wall that defends yourself and your family. Don't let it spill over to other areas, just deal with the core issue of that problem. Then move to the next.

If their accusations won't work, they get angry

Nehemiah 4:1 tells us when Sanballat heard what they were doing, he mocked them and became 'hot' with anger - the Hebrew says he was burning with anger at them. People will sometimes do that when they know they have lost control of you. That's ok if your cause is just and righteous. That is their issue of the heart only they can remedy.

Nehemiah 4:9 says the people were armed as they built the wall. They set a watch so no one could come at night to vandalize their work. We must realize while we are doing the Lord's will, we must do so 'armed' with the Lord, aware others will threaten us and maybe attack - they need to see we are equal to any challenge.

Christians sometimes think because they are peaceful that is all that is required. No, you have to be capable of defending yourself, your faith. It is that potential of a strong response that makes the enemy afraid. If you're just harmless then demons can walk all over you. We must assert our will over them.

If you are harmless but have the potential to use the name of Jesus against them, have the potential to stand up for yourself and your views and your morals, then the enemy respects that and will think twice before attacking you.

It is that Nehemiah, though on a peaceful work, armed the workers, so the enemies who threatened attack, would know Nehemiah was strong and would in fact defend himself - and all on his side would defend themselves. Nehemiah 4:18 says, "...a sword hanging on each worker's belt..." Be harmless as doves, but wise as serpents.

Just say 'Oh no' when they want you to come to 'Ono'.

Chapter 6 reveals the ways the devil attacks us today, as seen through the eyes of Nehemiah. In 6:2-4 Sanballat and the others invite Nehemiah to come down off the wall in a distraction to come talk to them in the plain of Ono. This they did 4 times. Each time Nehemiah said, 'O no', he would not allow himself to be distracted from the assignment the Lord gave him. If a distraction threatens to pull you off what God has you doing, say 'Oh no' to Ono'.

The 5th attempt was an effort at extortion. Sanballat wrote a letter accusing Nehemiah with many lies, and threatened to send the letter to the king. Nehemiah confronted him with it, saying he knew it was a lie and that he wasn't afraid. He states in v9: "For they were trying to make us afraid, thinking they would weaken our hands from the work, now therefore, O God, strengthen our hands!"

In verses 10-12 Nehemiah receives a false prophecy delivered with the intent of fear, to make him do something stupid. Like a game bird flushed from its hiding place only to be shot out of the air, that was the intent of the false word. Nehemiah said in v11: "Why should a man such as I flee?" In v12 he says he perceived that God had not sent that man and that Sanballat was behind this false 'word from the Lord'.

What we have seen thus far

First they were angry with Nehemiah. Then they tried to talk him out of it at Ono, as a matter of distraction. Then they threatened him with lies to try to make him afraid. Then they spiritualized it in a false prophecy to try to make their scheme legitimate because it was wrapped in spirituality. Nehemiah armed himself and his workers, and kept working.

These efforts were the last efforts of Sanballat and friends to distract, extort, and threaten with fear and lies against Nehemiah and his team. Chapter 6:15-16 tells us the wall was finished, and: "...when all our enemies heard the wall was finished, and they saw all that was accomplished, they were downcast in their own eyes, for (only then) did they perceive that this was a work of God."

You see...

Sanballat's issue wasn't with Nehemiah, it was with the Lord. If you are doing anything worthwhile in the Lord - from raising a family to helping a friend through life - people who get into strife with you have as their real issue, the Lord. It isn't you, not about flesh and blood, but against Satan who incites one against another.

Realize that when others don't understand the direction you're going. When people do things just to distract you and delay what you are doing. When they lie about you or threaten you with lies, when they spiritualize their attack by bringing God into it, realize their issue is with the Lord - and if you stick to what you are doing, they will eventually see that you are from the Lord, what you are doing is from the Lord.

A mature person can love a person while disagreeing with them morally or spiritually. Such a one can maintain fellowship, even friendship. The immature find points of disagreement and break off friendships and fellowship. Their issue is with the Lord at that point, and their own heart.

Realize what you are doing affect many more than just your family

We would not receive the full impact of Nehemiah's work unless we looked what happened after the wall was finished.

As a result of the completed wall, people felt safe and secure within those boundaries.

You are your own Jerusalem. Make sure your walls are built so that in your heart and soul you feel safe, secure, at rest. Then include in the city your spouse, children at home. Then just outside the wall of your Jerusalem, is relatives - Judea - family, but they know their boundaries, know that you are in covenant now with your spouse and children, not with them. Then outward to distant relatives and associates, then outward to strangers in the 'uttermost parts'. (Acts 1:8)

Once people saw the walls, Nehemiah 7:66 tells us 42,360 people immigrated into the city from Babylon, restoring the temple worship, and v73 says in 7 months all Israel was back not only in Jerusalem, but living in the other cities their ancestors had lived in before being carried off to Babylon decades earlier.

But wait, there's more...

Ezra the scribe began teaching the people the Word of the Lord. Chapter 8:4 says Ezra stood on a pulpit of wood just for the purpose so the multitude could hear him, and v8 says he and others "...read in the book of the law clearly, with meaning, giving the sense of what it said, allowing them to understand the meaning."

Ezra sent the people away as they rejoiced upon hearing and understanding God's Word, telling them: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Verse 12 concludes: "All the people went their way to eat and drink with great joy and merriment, giving gifts to one another, because they had understood the words that had been read to them."

(Did you notice the joy of the Lord is your strength within the context of understanding His Word and ways, not just a blanket statement that His joy is your strength - the joy came from gaining understanding of Him)

All of that happened because 1 man refused to be distracted, threatened, coerced, bribed, or manipulated by those who opposed him.

That 1 man motivated others to join him, sharing the vision, and making it that each person had to rebuild the wall in front of their own house, making it personal, so that they were building to protect their own families.

There is much to learn from Nehemiah! New subject next week, until then, blessings,
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