

Shaken Out of God's House - Part 2

By Phyllis Corbin

How could Nehemiah have convinced the nobles and the Jewish landowners to give back what they had taken from their brothers? From Nehemiah 5:14-19 is the answer.

14. Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerses, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year - twelve years- neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. 15. But the earlier governors - those preceding me - placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. 16. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. 17. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. 18. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of water and wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on those people. 19. Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people (NIV)

Nehemiah had lived what he demanded of the people. He called them to fairness because he had been fair. He lived below his standard because he felt poverty of the people. The people he had to rebuke could not stand up to accuse him for he had not acted as other governors. He placed no heavy burdens on the people and the reason is found in the latter part of verse 15. He acted as he did out of reverence for God.

Notice a powerful point here. It is true that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". It is no wonder that Jesus stated the first and greatest commandment as, "Love the Lord your God with all your strength." Then He said the second was "Love your neighbor as yourself." If our relationship to God is right we have a much easier time to love others. In fact, every commandment is based on the first. If I love God I will not steal, will not kill, I will not commit adultery, I will not covert etc.

The last verse of the chapter seems to indicate Nehemiah wanted some credit for what he was doing for the people. "Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people." It was common in those times that the good deeds of a person were recalled as a memorial to them. In Nehemiah's case they may even have been recorded in the temple. It is one thing to receive the praise of men, but Nehemiah, who knew of this memorial practice, wanted to be remembered by God. Nehemiah's prayers are closely paralleled by Nebuchadnezzar's prayer to his god, Ö Marduk. My Lord, do remember my deeds favorably as good deeds, may these my good deeds be always before your mind."

Neh 6: When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and no breach remained in it (even though up to that time I had not positioned doors in the gates), 6:2 Sanballat and Geshem sent word to me saying, "Come on! Let's set up a

time to meet together at Kephiri in the plain of Ono." Now they intended to do me harm. 6:3 So I sent messengers to them saying, "I am engaged in an important work, and I am unable to come down. Why should the work come to a halt when I leave it to come down to you?" 6:4 They contacted me four times in this way; I responded the same way each time. 5 The fifth time that Sanballat sent his assistant to me in this way, he had an open letter in his hand. 6:6 Written in it were the following words: "Among the nations it is rumored (and Geshem has substantiated this) that you and the Jews have intentions of revolting, and for this reasons you are building the wall. Furthermore, according to these rumors you are going to become their king. 6:7 You have also established prophets to announce in Jerusalem on your behalf, 'We have a king in Judah!' Now the king is going to hear about these rumors. So come on! Let's talk about this." 6:8 I sent word back to him, "We are not engaged in these activities you are describing. All of this is a figment of your imagination." 6:9 They all were wanting to scare us, supposing, "Their hands will grow slack from the work, and it won't get done." Now strengthen my hands."

The threesome who had created such problems for Nehemiah come roaring back again in Chapter 6. They had heard that there was not a gap left in the wall of Jerusalem and soon the gates and bars would be put in place. If this work was going to be stopped, they knew it would have to be done quickly. They had tried threats and intimidation, but they had been met with a determined group of workers on the wall of Jerusalem. The internal conflicts had been resolved so now they tried to weaken the leadership of Nehemiah

Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem summoned Nehemiah to the plain of Ono, a sort of neutral ground. Nehemiah knew it was a trap so he sent messengers stating he had a bit project to complete and he couldn't go down. Four times they sent the same aggravating request and each time it was refused.

The fifth time the request came it had a different twist. It came with an unsealed message. The message accused Nehemiah and the Jews of creating a rebellion of reinstating the prophetic office and proclaiming the coronation of a King. The message insinuated that if this news reached Persia it would bring judgment upon them all. This was Middle Eastern blackmail to draw Nehemiah away from his work. For a letter to be unsealed was another form of threat. The lack of a seal would mean the contents were for public consumption. Almost surely now the news would reach back to the Persian court.

Nehemiah took it all in stride. He sent his reply: "Your plot is a figment of your imagination. Nothing of the sort is happening." Then we get a little aside from Nehemiah. He understood their tactic, "They're just trying to demoralize us and we won't finish the wall."

Nehemiah does something that he's getting famous for. He prayed again: 'Lord strengthen my hands.'

Three points"

1. Expect attack from the enemy: lies distractions
2. Don't get down off the wall: there's work to be done

3. Don't forget to pray: it's our source of strength

May God help us all to be on guard for enemy attack and never forget that we serve a God who will strengthen us and keep us in the Shelter of His loving arms. Let us pray when we are under attack and claim victory right from the start for we do have victory in the name of Jesus He gave us that when He died on Calvary for our sins and paid the debt that we could not pay We have victory, we are healed , we are set free Praise you Jesus!@

God bless

Sister Phyllis