

BUILDING IN TROUBLOUS TIMES

"Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Anointed One, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troublous times" (Daniel 9:25; ASV).

"It shall be built again . . . even in troublous times." Most of us will not need convincing as to the troublous times. Let us be equally emphatic—"It *shall* be built again." We ought to read in this connection several chapters from the Book of Nehemiah. They present the practical fulfillment of the word of prophecy—for there is a practical side to the Lord's word. Nehemiah and those with him came into the experience of this prophecy; it *was* built again. And you may ask Nehemiah and the others if it is true that it was built in troublous times, and I think they will agree that that is a very mild description. We could spend a great deal of profitable time considering this whole matter of the building, but I want to bring a simple emphasis to you, and that is that the troublous times are vitally related to the building, and the troublous times of which we are all more or less aware are directly intended to hinder the building.

OPPOSITION TO THE BUILDING

You will notice a kind of crescendo of antagonism in proportion as the work goes on. When Nehemiah first arrived and began to contemplate the proposition,

Sanballat and Tobiah, when they heard of it, it grieved exceedingly (Nehemiah 2:10). We read in Chapter 4:1, "But it came to pass that, when Sanballat heard that we build the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation"; and later on in that same chapter, when half the wall was built all round, it says that Sanballat and Tobiah and the rest of them, hearing that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, "then they were very wroth." You see how it piles up; because the building is going on, the antagonism gets fiercer and fiercer. Every time the inner counsels of these men are disclosed, you find that they had no particular enmity against Nehemiah or against the rest of the people of God so long as they were idle and content to dwell amid the ruins; but it was the building, the positive construction, the recovery of that which really represented Divine purpose, the object of God-given prophecy—as soon as that began to be contemplated, there was antagonism. When the work was begun there was wrath, and as the work progressed there was much more wrath. That is what it is all about. Have you been asking yourself concerning the troubles and perplexities—What is it all about? This is what it is all about. They of old gave their hands to Nehemiah. By Divine grace, we have given our hands to the Lord, to pursue His purpose, and out of the ruins of that which has been shame for Him to build up that which shall be for His glory. In proportion as our hearts have been found devoted to that task and ourselves given to that work, in the same proportion the troublesome times are very evident. Now that is meant, I think, to be an interpretation for us and explains a lot, and it is also an inspiration.

You notice the positive terms in which Daniel speaks. "It shall be built again." The Lord knew all about the troublesome times long before they arrived; before Sanballat and Tobiah arose, the Lord anticipated them. No doubt the people of God might have enjoyed building the wall without any opposition, but I think the more

enlightened would have wondered whether, after all, this was the thing. Was it the real thing?—because God had said this thing would be withstood, it would be in the midst of turmoil and trouble and bitterness and conflict that His testimony should arise from the ruins. The trouble came all right, and it does come; but I think Nehemiah went back to the word of Daniel and found not only the troublous time, but the Divine assurance—"it shall be built again." It is very refreshing not once or twice to find that, after he has described some particular form of wickedness that sought to overturn the work, instead of pursuing what would be the logical opening up of the narrative and saying, 'So we were not able to build the wall,' Nehemiah says, 'Such and such happened, so we built the wall!' The more evil came, the more they built. Surely there is a Divine inspiration to faith in the very opposition of the enemy, and it works like that. When things are easy, when things seem to be uncontested, that is when, logically, the building should go on; but how often it is not so. Heavenly logic is so different from earthly logic. When everything is contrary, then the work proceeds and the building goes on.

But we need to have our eyes opened, and chapters 3 to 6 of Nehemiah give us many helpful indications of the kind of thing the Devil does. I doubt whether he is very original, after all. He seems to repeat himself again and again. We read the Word, we read of things that happened centuries ago, and exactly the same things happen again. But it is strange, that although we know all about them theoretically, when they come they very nearly achieve their object; the things that we know all about so often overcome us.

THE WEAPON OF RIDICULE

The beginning is a most simple thing, the weapon of a child—ridicule. That is how they began, and in this critical, disdainful way, they stood around and laughed

at the people as they began their work of building. Nehemiah had to turn back to the Lord and say, "Hear, O our God; for we are despised" (Nehemiah 4:4). Well, what does it matter? Let our hearts answer what it matters. Do you like being laughed at, do you like being despised?—and the Devil chooses for his tools the people whose opinion matter to us. There are certain folk, certain realms of society and life, which, the more they despise us, the more in a sense do they confirm us in our faith; but Satan is a past-master in finding a direction from which this weapon of ridicule has such a powerful effect to weaken our hands, to make us desist from the purpose that God has put into our hearts. It is a very old stratagem of the Devil, but it is right up to date, and he will find quarters from which criticism coming to us will be accepted, and our hands weakened from the work. The feebleness that is ours, the blemishes that mark us, this fault and that fault—it all comes back to us. There is only one purpose behind it, and that is to weaken our hands, that we should accept this poor, low estimate, not merely of ourselves, but of the possibility of our fulfilling the task—that we should accept despair, and the work should cease. They got through, but it was touch and go; Nehemiah had to cry to God. We have to be very much alive to this weapon of the devil—the suggested impossibility, the hopelessness, the folly, of seeking to do what we *know* to be the purpose of God in Christ. Well, that was only the beginning of a very long story.

THE WEAPON OF CONFUSION

"They conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein. But we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night" (4:8,9). This evidently was not a frontal attack of the kind that was later contemplated to destroy them. This was some subtle idea that they had of introducing themselves amongst the

children of Israel to cause confusion. If you read the previous chapter, you will find the building was an orderly process. Everyone was in his right place, and thus the work proceeded. And so I presume that this attempt to bring confusion was to get people out of their place, to get them all mixed up. And the work was not only orderly; it was co-operative, they all built together; and the confusion, I suppose, would be to set them one against the other. And Nehemiah said, We had to pray to God to save us from confusion. We need to pray that for ourselves and for the people of God. And he said, We not only prayed about it; we kept watch day and night, we were on the lookout so that we should not be set one against another and get out of our place. We need to pray about it and we need to watch. Of course—and that is the very essence of the strategy of the Devil—we are apt to feel that it is somebody else's fault that things are wrong, and all kinds of personal considerations will be brought in. But do remember once again—what is Satan's purpose? It is to bring confusion. And what will confusion mean?—that the work will be stopped. And how very often in lives, in homes, in the assemblies of the Lord's people, in the Church and the work of the Lord in larger realms, when the first weapon of ridicule has failed, how often has success been achieved by this stratagem of setting people one against the other in disorder, challenging, disputing, and suspicious of one another. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night" that that should not happen, and it did not happen, and so the building went on. Praise God! Let us do likewise.

THE WEAPON OF DISCOURAGEMENT

But there was more: and really we cannot blame Sanballat and his allies for this—this one further opposition which proves how much the thing is spiritual, and how the human instruments, after all, only represent

something of deeper antagonism behind. The next thing that happened was that among the people of God themselves trouble arose. Judah said—Judah above all people—"The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall" (Nehemiah 4:10). The antagonism has changed from that outward phase to an inward and spiritual one. First of all, the consciousness of insufficiency—we are getting tired, we are getting weary, we have not the strength. Now Judah above all people is the one who is to praise the Lord, but praise is silenced when Judah begins to look at himself. There is no praise then, there is despair. We cannot build, we have not the strength! And how subtle and strong and persistent is this pressing home upon us of our hopelessness. It may be a new sense of our own spiritual hopelessness, it may be a pressure upon our souls, it may be pressure upon our bodies; but there is one purpose behind it—that we should accept the inward conviction that we cannot go on, we have not the strength, we must give up. There is no song when we are looking at ourselves, there is despair. The only way through for Judah is to do what he ought to have done then—to be true to his name and praise the Lord. There is strength in God even when our strength is decayed.

That was on the one hand—they were impressed with their hopelessness. On the other hand, they were appalled by the rubbish that had to be cleared away. What was the rubbish? I take it that, among other things, it was that which had served a purpose, but which had no value any longer, and they had come to realize how much in their circumstances and in their lives, that in its time had seemed to be of value to the Lord, was proving now to be so much rubbish in the way, an impediment, a hindrance to the building. Sometimes that comes upon us, and it needs to. I think it is well that we should take note of this. You can see it in other people's lives sometimes (it is no doubt true of all)

how the building is held up by the accumulation of things in their past spiritual history that may have had a value, but now are in the Lord's way. Said Judah, when they looked at all that—It is no use, it is purposeless, it is hopeless to attempt to get that out of the way and build something which really is in the Divine plan. Many children of God who have overcome others of these subtle temptations of which we have spoken have themselves been brought to a standstill by this; they have been overwhelmed, held up, by the accumulation of that which, shall we say, is traditional in the church, or actual in their own experience—that has had a past but has no present and no future; and they lack the resolution of faith to clear it out of the way and get on with the building.

Nehemiah does not tell us what happened, he does not give us the inner history, but evidently they overcame this temptation.

THE SPUR TO FRESH FAITH

But there were other tests. It is impossible for us now to go into them in detail. It will be a profitable occupation for you to take these chapters and trace the very many factors that were present in the building, the combined tendency of which was to prevent its accomplishment; and at the same time to look to the end of the story, and say, Well, in spite of it all, praise the Lord, the wall was built, it was finished! "It shall be built again, even in troublous times." Can we take hold of that?

Troublous times these are for us all, but the troublous times are meant to provoke us to fresh faith. First of all, take note that the troublous times are not a strange accident. It is not brother or sister So-and-so who is the cause of the trouble; in a sense, it is not ourselves; though we all have part. It is the fiendish work of the Devil. He will let us alone as long as nothing is happening, but he is up in arms when there is the

BREAKING THE SATANIC SIEGE

prospect of building something for God. May I bring again the simple words of affirmation?—"It shall be built again." God is more than enough, He has the answer every time. Nehemiah was not always able to perceive the nature of the temptation and the assault, but he was always able to overcome by keeping his eyes on the Lord and on the work. When they tried to get him away, he did not know the real nature of the call, but he was four times saved from a trap by keeping the purpose in view, and by saying "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down" (6:3). That is the way through—to keep our eyes on the purpose and, above all, to keep our eyes on the Lord, never minding the troublous times. It shall be built!

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