

# Abiding Fruit

*Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart*

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## **We Built The Wall Nehemiah 4:6**

The accomplishment of the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and the people was a remarkable instance of faith and trust in God. It was done in the midst of great hostility and open opposition. It was done in the midst of devious and subtle opposition. There were times of frustration and hardship. It was largely due to the leadership of Nehemiah that the wall was finished in breath-taking time – 52 days (Neh. 6:15). His leadership was not just his physical presence among the returned exiles, but his spiritual leadership was exemplary.

Nehemiah's spiritual stature did not happen overnight. It began when he was an exile in captivity. He was cupbearer to the King of Persia, Artaxerxes in the city of Susa. It was an important position. Nehemiah could forfeit his life if someone tried to poison the king, since he tasted the wine first. As cupbearer, it is obvious that Nehemiah considered the state of his country, his city and his people.

Nehemiah 1 points out this interest and concern of Nehemiah as he eagerly seeks for information from Jerusalem concerning the conditions of the city. He knows that some exiles have already returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra and he is anxious to hear first-hand accounts of what was happening. Nehemiah's brother, Hanani had recently returned and the news was not good. Jerusalem's walls and gates were in ruins (1:3).

Nehemiah is overwrought at this disastrous news because it implies that not much work had been happening back in Judea. He immediately seeks the face of God in prayer with weeping and fasting. This is a lost practice among believers today, but churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and prior to that sought God in times of humiliation through prayer, mourning and fasting. Perhaps this is why spiritual power was theirs truly and why we think we are spiritually powerful.

Nehemiah states that he sought God day and night (1:6). He confessed the sins of his people (see Ezra 9; Daniel 9). He acknowledges that their captivity was a just reward for their rebellion and waywardness (9:7, 8). It was in this frame of mind that Nehemiah reported for duty before the king (1:11 – 2:1).

Artaxerxes was a very perceptive man and he noticed the sorrow on Nehemiah's face and so asked him about it (2:2). Nehemiah says that he was greatly afraid since the king would not be pleased with poor work performance. He states his problem clearly to Artaxerxes. Again, Artaxerxes realizes that there is more to the situation, and asks Nehemiah what he is really asking of him. The Bible states that when Artaxerxes asked this question, that Nehemiah immediately prayed to God (2:4).

It is clear that Nehemiah has spent a great deal of time considering what is required to fix the situation in Jerusalem. He is able to tell the king precisely what is required (2: – 8).

Nehemiah is under no illusions as to the greatness of the task though it involves simple bricks and mortar. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem is a reflection of the presence of God among His people. As long as the city lies in ruins, it indicates that God is not considered highly enough or treasured greatly enough by the people. They are content with the status quo. The Christian Church is in this situation. We are

inundated with spiritual materials (bricks and mortar) but we are powerless. We live in the nation that is the wealthiest and most powerful on the planet, but there is no question that spiritual power does not reside in the nation. We hold seminars on every conceivable subject. We form societies, committees and councils to answer the desperate needs of the hour, and yet the needs are not answered. Why is this so? We have all kinds of marriage and family councils, and yet the divorce rate continues to escalate, both in the nation and in the Church. We should and can legitimately ask, of what use are the councils?

Nehemiah did not waste time with these things. He simply knew what was needed, made his own plans without telling anybody and then implemented his plan of action (2:12 - 16). Such a strategy today would never leave the ground or the table (or wherever it was lying), for the simple reason that we are too easily offended. The Church has bought into the lie that somehow we as Christians have our own set of rights and don't trample or offend them. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were not too sensitive to the problem of intermarriage, excessive interest levied or business trading on the Sabbath (Ezra 9, 10; Neh. 4:4; 5:6 - 11; 6:10 - 14; esp. 13:1 - 30).

The problem of culture and Christianity is further compounded by those who interpret culture. We have an incredible array of intelligent people making comments about culture and Christianity in this country and nothing seems to go anywhere? Why is this? One answer is this. We are too concerned with making these kinds of statements than we are about what we are to do. We are fed an enormous amount of information about what is happening, but no-one seems capable of telling us what to do. The reason for this is because we have relegated Jesus Christ, our Lord to doing what we think He ought to be doing on our behalf. Since we do not like to offend anyone, we do not know how to engage in proper church discipline. We do not speak the truth to each other because we are afraid we will offend one another.

The power of Christianity lies in simple obedience and likeness to Christ, and this path is the way of death. Sooner or later, great persecution must come to the Church, if we would be effective. All who would be godly must suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). It is perhaps for this reason alone, that we are mostly ineffective and ungodly. There is no purifying element for us. If we lived in Nehemiah's time, he would have radically assaulted our senses (and perhaps our bodies (see Neh. 13:8, 11, 15, 21). Nehemiah knew the standard of God, and he was prepared to suffer for it.

The rebuilding of the wall required immense self-discipline and commitment. The enemies were prepared to kill Nehemiah and his helpers if they persisted in working. This did not stop Nehemiah. He prayed to God and then returned in the power of God to work. People do not like to hear the truth, but the sensitive heart will listen. We need sensitive hearts that will not be offended at God's Word, and that will, regardless of the consequences, pursue godliness and the will of God.

If necessary we must take the sword and the trowel in the hand (Neh. 4:15 - 23) to accomplish the work. We must fight at times and we must work patiently and quietly. There are more evangelical conferences, councils and studies done in this land than anywhere else. There are more political conferences, councils and studies done in this land than anywhere else. There are more family and marriage conferences and studies done in this land than anywhere else. There are more pastoral conferences here than anywhere else in the world, and what do we have? Our marriages and families are in tatters, pastors and ministers are hopeless at preaching with passion and power, homosexuality and sexual deviancy is rampant in the Church, and many other such problems. Are we better off than when George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards reveled in God's "Great Awakening"? I don't think so. All of our conferences, councils and studies will not, and cannot bring genuine biblical revival. Only God can do this. He seeks those who seek Him.

We need to be like Robert Murray M'Cheyne who said, it is not great talents that God blesses, but likeness to Jesus. Let us stop worshipping men and start worshipping God. Only then will we join Jesus in building His Church, and we shall be like Nehemiah as he built his wall.