***Nehemiah, a Man of Understanding

RV76-02***

In Revelation 4:1-5, the apostle John finds himself in the third heaven in the throne room of God. We have been examining the scene before him. This is segment number 11 of that series. He has been transported in a vision into the third heaven, which is God's throne room. His body physically is still on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of modern Turkey. Before the Father's throne, John sees God the Holy Spirit symbolized by seven flaming torches. These torches symbolize the ministries of the Holy Spirit to the humanity of Jesus Christ, as described for us in Isaiah 11:2.

So, we're using the Bible to interpret the Bible. What we read in the book of the Revelation, and its reference to these seven torches, we interpret on the basis of an explanation found elsewhere in the Bible, referring to these seven torches. That is in Isaiah 11:2. We find that these seven torches symbolize the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, not only to Jesus Christ the Messiah in His humanity, but that same Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer today, is also ministering in the same way to our humanity. So, the church-age believer, who is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit, also blesses by these tremendous services from God the Holy Spirit. Again, I want to remind you that this is a crucial and important doctrine.

The great forward motion of Christianity, which was restored in the period of the Reformation, was the direct result of the reformers returning to the Scriptures. That's what led them back to the doctrine of being saved apart from human works and human doing – by faith alone. But one of the great things that the reformers missed was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It was rather odd, but they just did not click on that. They just did not get it all together when it came to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

So, the result was they had basically sound doctrine restored, but they were still functioning on the same old basis that they had, when they were all Roman Catholics, on human effort systems. They did not bring together the doctrinal truth of Scripture in their daily lives. The missed the point at which that is the hinge pin – the hinge of that joining of doctrine and life is the person of the Spirit of God. He is the one that connects the two.

So, consequently, when they missed that doctrine, they left the two separated. So, you have what is often referred to as cold orthodoxy. Oh, they knew the truth. They knew how to go to heaven, but they had no concept of how to live Christian lives that were functioning on the basis of the manual that God had given for human living – in the Bible. The key to all that was the person of the Holy Spirit.

**Deity**

So, as John looks at the scene here in heaven, he sees these seven flaming torches. The first torch that he sees, we have discovered, is the torch of deity, because that is the torch that describes God the Holy Spirit as the spirit of "YHWH." That is that sacred name of God used so many times in the Bible, which is the most identifying name for the Creator God. It is particularly the name which is used in terms of God and His covenant work – the promises that He makes.

**Wisdom**

The second torch, we find from Isaiah, stands for wisdom. The Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of wisdom. This is the provider of divine viewpoint frame of reference and values. Everybody has a value system. The value system that you possess is what directs your life. If you don't have a strong sense of values, you will live in a way that will be self-destructive. If you have a right sense of values, which you can only receive from God through Scripture, then your life will go in a different direction. It will be a life of blessing, and a life of prospering and significance. So, this provision of wisdom is a very important provision from God the Holy Spirit.

**Understanding**

Then we look at a third torch. We're on that one now, and that is understanding. God the Holy Spirit is described as the spirit of understanding. The spirit of understanding means the spirit of discernment. It is the ability to see through things, and to see through people. It is the ability to comprehend the significance of a given set of facts. Some people can look at a set of facts, and never comprehend what those facts are telling them. Someone else can look at a set of facts and have discernment. It's a tremendous quality. It's a tremendous factor to have in a human being – that you can look at a set of information (at some data) and make the right decision as to what that data means.

Some of the greatest inventions of the world have been the result of the fact that the inventors had great capacity and discernment. They could look at a set of facts, and line them up, and they could see a significance to those facts which other people, looking on those same facts, never did connect, and never did see the significance of them. So, this is the quality that the Holy Spirit give to believers – the capacity to comprehend the significance of a given set of facts. The spiritual understanding relative to that set of facts comes as a gift from God the Holy Spirit. It's the capacity of knowing what God thinks in a matter. And you get this from God the Holy Spirit, through the learning of Bible doctrine.

That's why it is so important to learn Scripture. That's why we remind you again and again – the reason God the Holy Spirit lives within you is to be your teacher. Spiritual things are not a matter of how smart you are in your IQ. It is not a matter of how much education you have. That's why we call it the grace system of perception. Learning spiritual things is the result of the teaching ministry of God the Holy Spirit. You can be the most ignorant, uneducated do-do that the world has ever seen, but you can become a genius in the understanding of spiritual things. The two systems are totally different. Never make that mistake, and sell yourself short in your capacity to enter in to an understanding of the Bible. That's why the teaching of Scripture is so important. Once you have that information, one of the things you have brought into your life is the capacity for understanding.

Human wisdom is very distorted, as you know. The old sin nature takes things and twists them around backwards, so it's very misleading. When you sit down and try to reason things through, and try to interpret a set of facts on the basis of human wisdom, you'll come out with the thing all botched up and twisted around, because the sin nature contaminates our understanding. It is only the Spirit of God that can straighten that out.

**An Enlightened Mind**

These two torches, the torch of wisdom and the torch of understanding, have to do with the mentality of the soul. We have the mind in the soul of the believer. Then we have also the emotions, and we have the will. This is what is called the soul. That is your personality. These two torches particularly affect the mind of the soul. They have to do with getting your mind oriented in the direction in which you can think and act and live in a way that is blessing. When your mind is so oriented to the Word of God, then the Bible says that you have an enlightened mentality.

You're not born with this. You come into the Christian life with a mind that is completely dark. You come into the Christian life with a mind that has absorbed all that human viewpoint that you've been taught all your life in secular schools, and that you've picked up from the people you associate with, and from all of the influences of the media in things we read and things we see on television. All of that human viewpoint completely distorts the mind. But once you start filling that mind with God's divine viewpoint, because you've been taught Scripture, you have a mind that Ephesians 1:18 calls an enlightened mind. That enables you to come to the point where you have the mind of Christ. Ephesians 1:18 says. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. You have an enlightened mind.

**A Darkened Mind**

On the other hand, the book of Ephesians also tells us that, if you are negative to doctrinal instruction, or if you never receive it, then you have a mind which is darkened. Ephesians 4:18 says, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the hardness in their hearts" (the hardness in their minds).

So, every human being today either has an enlightened mind, as a result of having learned doctrinal principles, or he has a darkened mind as a result of a lack of doctrinal principles. It doesn't matter what your IQ is, or your education, or anything else. You can be in either category.

**Nehemiah**

One of the great examples of this quality of understanding, which God the Holy Spirit provides for us, is the experiences of one of the Old Testament leaders – a man named Nehemiah. We're going to be in the book of Nehemiah now, so please open your Bibles to that book. We need a little bit of the historical background to give you a briefing on the situation in the book of Nehemiah. The Jews had been taken by King Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon as captives. Nebuchadnezzar, in his anger over the rebellion of the Jews, ordered the city of Jerusalem destroyed, and he ordered the wall around Jerusalem torn down. He ordered the temple destroyed. He took many of the valuable items from the temple back to Babylon. This was all in fulfillment of what the prophets had foretold – that there would be a period of 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

Now, that 70-year period is over, and Ezra (the book just in front of Nehemiah) describes how Ezra returned. Now, the Babylonian empire has been conquered by the Persian Empire. It's a combination empire of the Medo-Persians. Now Persia is the world ruler, which is exactly as Daniel predicted that world empires would follow. Ezra, in the period of the Persian authority over all the world, shows King Darius that his name was written in Scripture ahead of time. And Darius is appalled. He says, "Your God recorded my name before I was even around?" Indeed he did. And the King was told that the reason for this was because he would be called upon by the living God to perform a great service for the people of God. That service namely was to give them permission, after 70 years of captivity and a dispersion from the land, to return to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the temple. Darius said, "You can do it." He gave them the supplies and what they needed to do the job.

Now, the temple has been rebuilt. The day came for the dedication of the temple. The younger people were very happy, and they rejoiced, and they cheered that the temple was again restored. The older people shed tears, because the temple was but shadow of that magnificent structure that Solomon had built and which Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. It was a temple again, but nothing like the first one. So, the older people, as they looked upon this new one, were happy that the temple was restored and that the worship services and the order of the Old Testament Mosaic code was going to be established, but they couldn't help shedding tears over the glory that was now passed.

But the one thing that had not been done was the protective wall rebuilt around the city of Jerusalem. That's where Nehemiah comes in the picture, as he is led by God to be burdened for restoring this very critical feature in ancient times – the protective wall around the city of Jerusalem. So, we have, in the book of Nehemiah, the record of the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem after the Jews have been released from their 70 years of captivity. This historical account is a tremendous example of how a man with understanding (a man with "binah," as the Hebrew word describes it) is able to function, because God the Holy Spirit has given them the capacity to see through people and to see through events.

Nehemiah is in captivity, as we have indicated. The king who is heading up the Persian Empire at that time is Artaxerxes I. Artaxerxes I, who is also called Longimanus, is the king at the time that Nehemiah is his cup bearer. Nehemiah is the man who has been placed in the responsible position of verifying that what the king drinks has not been poisoned. So, it is a very responsible position. Nehemiah is moved by God to seek permission from Artaxerxes I to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. The temple has been rebuilt under Ezra, but the walls have not.

Nehemiah recognizes that the reason for this captivity was because of the negative volition attitude of the Jews toward the Word of God. In Nehemiah 1:7, he recognizes that the trouble they have is because of their stupidity when they knew the Word of God. Nehemiah says, "We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I beseech You, the Word that You commanded your servant Moses saying, 'If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples (that is, among the nations). But if you turn to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though there were of you cast out into the uttermost part of heaven, yet I will gather then from there, and I will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name.' Now these are Your servants and Your people whom You have redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand."

So, Nehemiah says to the Lord, "I recognize that the reason we're in this terrible condition is because we were negative to the Word of Truth that You gave us. We ignored the doctrine (the guidelines) for living that you gave us under Moses. You did exactly what You said You would. You said that You would scatter us among the nations, and that has happened." Now Nehemiah is looking to the Lord for the restoration of the people to their homeland and to the city of Jerusalem.

So, Nehemiah requests and receives permission from King Artaxerxes I for a leave of absence to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 2:3, we have that record: "Nehemiah said to the king, 'Let the king live forever. Why shouldn't my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lies in waste, and its gates are consumed with fire?'" The king had noticed that Nehemiah, looked very sad while serving him. He said, "Nehemiah, what I see on your face is not the sadness of somebody who is physically ill. I see the sadness of somebody who has a burden of soul. What's the trouble?" And so the Nehemiah proceeds to explain.

"Then the king said unto me, 'For what do you request?' So, I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king, 'If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may rebuild it.'" So, he requests permission to go back to rebuild the wall, and in the process then, also to be rebuilding the houses.

**445 B.C.**

The year was 445 B.C. Artaxerxes I said, "Okay, Nehemiah, you go back and rebuild the wall. Give me a time schedule when you are going to be back. What do I need to give you so that you can get the job done and return?" This is a very important date in history, because the year 445 B.C., when Artaxerxes I issued the decree authorizing Nehemiah to have a leave of absence to go back to rebuild the walls around the city of Jerusalem, is the date from which Daniel's 70 weeks are counted. Remember that Daniel had a vision that God was going to deal with the Jewish people for 70 weeks. However, the word "weeks" there (indicating the idea of 70 weeks) means 70 *weeks of years*. So, what Daniel was told was that from this date, 490 years are going to roll by, and then God will have finished his dealing with the Jewish people. At the end of 490 years, Jesus Christ the Messiah would come back to the earth a second time.

Historically, from 445 B.C., things moved along. They moved along for exactly 483 years. This was 483 years from the time of the decree of Artaxerxes I to the death of Christ on the cross. That was precisely 483 years. Then, even as Daniel's prophecy predicted, the Messiah was cut off; that is, He was rejected by the people to whom He was sent, and something very dramatic happened. As it were, at this point, after 483 years, the prophetic clock of God's dealing with the Jewish people stopped. The clock just stopped dead. We know very well that seven years has not been fulfilled.

Instead, the New Testament Scriptures explain to us that a new program was interjected. God temporarily stopped his dealing with the Jewish people. This had not been told to Daniel. Daniel just said the total package is going to be 490 years; that is, seventy times seven (seventy weeks of years). At the end of that time, the Messiah would return a second time. Daniel was only told that Messiah was going to be cut off at a certain point. That point being was seven years shy of that total 490 years. Daniel didn't know why. The reason was that the church age was to be interjected, and God was temporarily stopping his dealing with the Jewish people to bring out a bride for His Son, Jesus Christ, which is what you and I consist of as the members of the body of Christ, the church.

**Israel vs. the Church**

That has gone on for almost 2,000 years now. But the Jewish program has not terminated. It's very important to recognize that seven years are missing. Either God is lying (He missed the boat); He was not able to reveal to Daniel the exact time schedule; or else, God knew exactly what He was saying, and Daniel recorded it accurately, and seven years are yet to be fulfilled. One of the reasons this is important is because it helps us to see that there is a difference between the Old Testament Jewish order and the New Testament order of the church. Most churches think that God somehow washed His hands of the Jews and cast them out. Then, along came the church, and the church is now the continuation of all those promises to Abraham. And that's not true.

**Priests**

The result is that you bring over from the Old Testament all kinds of ideas. Where do you think the idea of some kind of a prince standing up before God, representing the people, comes from? It comes from the Old Testament order, where you had to go to God through a priest. Whereas, the New Testament makes it clear that every one of you is your own priest before God. It's a totally different picture.

**Altars**

What do you think the idea of an altar comes from? An altar was something to perform a sacrifice on. In the Old Testament, they needed it. It's a blasphemous insult to God for you to be still working from altars as if you were still working and waiting for Christ to come, and for the price of sin to be paid for. Every time the Roman Catholic priest performs the Mass, which is the bloodless sacrifice of Christ all over again, upon his altar, he's blaspheming almighty God. Since he thinks he's sacrificing, he should have an altar. But it is a disgrace to have an altar today, because it is saying that sin has not been yet paid for.

**Tithing**

Where do you think this idea of tithing comes from – putting the screws on people for financing the local church ministry? It was an Old Testament income tax. It was a religious income tax. You get to the New Testament and open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. Read it sometime at your leisure. It gives you the whole gamut of how you give money in the New Testament. And suddenly, you decide, "Hey, there's not a word in here about tithing. It's a whole grace system. It's a new ballgame. Now, it's giving on the basis of how God the Holy Spirit, who indwells me, guides and leads me to give." It is a marvelous difference. It's liberty and freedom and grace over against the whip of the Law. In most churches, all of that system of the Old Testament is carried over in one way or another into the New Testament church system.

**Holy Days**

Where do you think the ideas of holy days comes from? Why is it that you think people get all hot under the collar and excited about the holy day of Easter and the holy day of Christmas? That doesn't come from the Bible. Both of those were originally pagan holidays that were brought over from the Babylonian system. But for the Jews of the Old Testament, in their system, they did have certain holy days.

**The Christian Sabbath**

Where do you think the idea of a Christian Sabbath comes from? Did you ever hear anyone talk about the Christian Sabbath, as if Sunday were the Sabbath day? Everybody who knows anything about the Bible knows that the Sabbath day was Saturday, and that there was no work on Saturday. You didn't do anything. Here we come along, and suddenly we've got a Christian Sabbath day. People say, "Oh, this is Sunday. This is the Sabbath day. You mustn't do any work. You mustn't have any fun." And there are some preachers who give the congregation the idea that the thing to do on Sunday is to be very grim. And they watch and they catch somebody smiling, and they say, "Oh, I saw you smile. This is the Sabbath day, and I'm not going to smile. But I saw you smile. You said you didn't, but you did." It is a very grim thing.

Where do you get that? You bring it over from the Old Testament system. That was a terrible system to live under. It was the difference between Law and grace. These seven years tell us that those systems are different. God is not through with the Jew. He's not through with that Old Testament system. It has temporarily been put on a holding pattern, and is being held off while, out of Jews and gentile, a bride is being formed – the church, the body of Christ for the Father's Son.

In the year 445 B.C., that 490 years began. Historically, we can figure out the fact that 483 years have clicked by. Where is the seven years going to come in? When the rapture of the church takes place, and all Christians are taken out, and God the Holy Spirit is removed from His residence upon this earth (because he indwells believers, and He lives with them), then, without the restraining hand of God the Holy Spirit, all evil will break loose upon this earth. Then will follow a period of seven years which the Bible calls the tribulation period. That is the era of the tribulation. This seven-year period is the substance of the book of the Revelation. From chapter 6 through chapter 19, we are going to be told what is going to happen here on earth during this period of human history when the last seven years of God's dealing with the Jewish people is going to be fulfilled.

**The Tribulation**

Among the things that's going to happen is that it's going to be a terrible time for everybody who is a Jew. It's going to be the worst time of persecution that Jews have ever experienced in all their history. It's going to be so bad that they're finally going to look to a strong man, the antichrist, and they're going to align themselves with him. He is a man who rises on the world scene out of Western Europe, and who will promise to be their protector. Anybody who knows anything about what's going on in the world today knows that, if the Jew needs anything today nationally, he needs somebody to protect him. Everybody is ganging up on the nation of Israel now. If they all get their act together, they'll rub Israel off the face of the earth without any trouble. And the Jews know it. And that's why the Jews do not want to admit today that they have the atom bomb. That is because, if shove comes to push, they're going to fall back on the atom bomb as their last hope of defending themselves. But they know that they stand alone, and now they're not even sure they can count on the United States to back them up.

When this seven-year period begins, they are going to learn what the wrath of God really means. They're going to learn what it meant for them to have glibly said, when Pilate said, "I want to wash my hands of the blood of this just man," and they screamed back, "His blood be upon us and our children." They're going to find out what the blood of Christ (that guilt of that murder) upon them as a people really is, and what they brought down upon themselves.

So, Nehemiah is a very interesting figure, because when Artaxerxes I said, "Go back and rebuild the wall," that 445 B.C. date becomes the anchor point for subsequent history. Upon the completion of the church age, when the body of Christ is complete, the rapture will take place, and the seven years will be fulfilled.

**Rebuilding the Wall**

Nehemiah, having received this authorization, returns to Jerusalem. The first evidence that he gives that he is a man of discernment is that he makes a night survey of the situation relative to the wall. He does not come in and tell all that he plans to do. Nehemiah 2:12: "And I arose in the night, and some few men with me, and told no man what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem. Neither was there any beast with me except the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the Gate of the Valley, even before the Jackal's Well, and to the Dung Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and its gates were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the Gate of the Fountain, and to the King's Pool, and there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, turned back, and entered by the Gate of the Valley, and so returned. The rulers did not know where I went or what I did. Neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest who did the work."

Nehemiah demonstrated that he needs a reconnaissance to get information. It is a sign of great discernment to know that you have to have information before you start running off at the mouth. You have to have information before you take action. If you are a discerning person, this is what you will soon learn. You will have the discernment to know that, until you know what you're talking about; until you know the basis of what you believe; and, until you know the situation as it is, you don't jump to take action. Nehemiah had a pretty good idea of what the situation was. But before he revealed his plans, he made this personal survey. This immediately reveals that we're dealing with a man who has a lot of smarts.

Nehemiah understands God's plan, so he organizes the Jews to rebuild the wall. Nehemiah 2:17-18: "Then I said unto them, 'You see the distress we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.' Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me, and also the king's words that he had spoken to me. And they said, 'Let us rise up build.' So, they strengthened their hands for this good work." He rallies the people to the job.

**Sanballat and Tobiah**

Nehemiah is immediately confronted by opposition of two birds named Sanballat and Tobiah. These words have come down historically as sort of a semi-insult. It is not a compliment to call somebody a Sanballat or a Tobiah, because, as you shall see, these were pagans who were on the scene, who had been having a wonderful time now because the city of Jerusalem was in destruction. They had moved in on this territory. This is one of the reasons that Nehemiah was keeping the plan secretly to himself until they were ready to implement it.

However, finally, the Jews start working on the wall. And the word gets back to Sanballat and Tobiah, which was the local syndicate at the time. The word gets back to the syndicate that Nehemiah has come with authorization from Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall, and that he has rallied the people to it.

Nehemiah 2:19: "But when Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, 'What is this thing that you do? Will you rebel against the king?' Then I answer them and said to them, 'The God of heaven will prosper us. Therefore, we, his servants, will arise and build. But you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.'"

**Courage**

A man of understanding is a man of courage. Sanballat and Tobiah, and their other associate, Geshem, were no small-time hoods. They were the big-time operators in the area. They came up and they laughed at him and said, "What are you going to do? Rebel against the king?" What they were suggesting was: "The king has destroyed these walls. Are you going to rebuild them?" You notice that Nehemiah doesn't explain a lot to them. He says, "The God of heaven is going to prosper us. I'm putting that right up front." As you will see, there was a lot of opposition which immediately followed at the instigation of Sanballat and Tobiah.

However, he says "We're the servants of this God. We're going to build this wall. And you don't have any part in it, so shove off. You have no portion of this. You don't have any memorial in Jerusalem. This is something in which you are not included." You might say, "Boy, that's bad public relations, Nehemiah. You should have gone to them and said, 'Now, fellas, we all want to live together. You know, we all worship the same God. It's one mountain, and we're all going up by different roads. We want to get together. We want to live in peace. I'll tell you, we'll buy the stuff from you guys. You can raise the price a little bit. The king won't know. Whatever I send in as requisitions and payments, he'll pay. And we'll work out something between us. You know, I mean, we're doing it for God.'"

That's not what this man did. This man knew that this is a God of integrity that he deals with. And Nehemiah, right off the bat, said, "I want it clearly understood. You guys are outsiders. You are under the judgment of God. We are the people of God because we understand the Word of God, and we are under His blessing. Furthermore, we're under His care. So, I'd go carefully. You're powerful men, but take care what you do.

**Ridicule**

Well, the opposition came in a variety of ways. One of the toughest oppositions any human being has to face, when you're out to do something for God, is ridicule. In Nehemiah 4:1-3 verses, he gets hit by ridicule: "But when it came to pass that when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry, and felt great indignation, and mocked the Jews. He spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned?' Now, Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, 'Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall break down their stone wall.'"

First of all, Sanballat comes along and sneers: "Who are these stupid Jews? What can they build? How are they going to put this together? Look at this rubble pile. Are they going to make something out of this?" Then his friend Tobiah says, "Yeah, if they do build anything, all a fox has to do is run and jump against it, and it'll fall over. That's the kind of craftsman they are."

So, they're standing here and making fun of these men as they're trying to build a wall. A man of understanding is not affected by ridicule. And Nehemiah was a man of divine understanding. He had the "binah" quality. These fellows weren't going to frighten or to discourage him one bit.

**Forceful Opposition**

He also faced the opposition by direct attack. Nehemiah 4:7: "And it came to pass that when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabians and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites, heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry, and all of them conspired together to come in to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it. Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night because of them."

Nehemiah said, "We got word through our intelligence systems that they were planning to attack us. So, we made plans to put men on guard to warn us so that we would be prepared for the attack." But the pagan group, who had moved in, was intending now to stop them by force. That's a little tougher opposition. That takes some real understanding as to what you're going to do now when somebody starts exercising muscle against you.

**Discouragement**

Then there was the opposition of the discouragement of the enormity of the job. Nehemiah 4:10: "And Judah said, 'The strength of the bears of burden has decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build a wall.'" One of the things they said was: "Look at this mess – the way this thing was torn down." The men were moving stuff. They didn't have machines. They were doing this by muscle power. The men are exhausted just trying to clear the rubbish out of the way, let alone to build a wall: "How in the world are we going to do this?"

It takes a man of understanding now to know how to deal with people, who would like to do a good thing, but who are staggered by the enormity of the job. Then Nehemiah 5:1-13 describe for us a problem of economic exploitation, where some of the Jews had to mortgage their property and sell themselves into slavery (into servitude) in order to finance themselves here in Jerusalem. It was in such a chaotic state. It was as if a war had passed through. They were resentful of the fact that they were mortgaged. They were economically pressed, and yet, they were trying to rebuild this wall. So, Nehemiah had to do deal with that problem in order to bring these people to the point where they felt they were being treated fairly.

**Socializing**

The next opposition, when Sanballat and Tobiah discovered they were not able to discourage them, they decided to try to get them to socialize. This is the way the world loves to do: cut a Christian down by getting him to socialize with them. Nehemiah 6:1: "Now it came to pass when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall, and that there was no breach left in it, though, at that time, I had not set up the doors upon the gates, that Geshem and Sanballat sent to me saying, 'Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.' But they thought to do me mischief." When they said, "Come, let us meet together," they said, "Ah, Nehemiah, come on down. Let's have lunch together. Let's sit down and have a little meal together to fellowship." That's very honoring, and that's very exhilarating.

Here are your enemies saying, "Oh, come on, I'm going to invite you to a party. We've had our differences, but let's get together." But the differences in the mind of Nehemiah were differences relative to what God was thinking, and what these evil men were thinking. These were no little differences, like: "I hate Fords, and you love Chevies, and, after all, we can be friends." These were very crucial, critical, basic differences. Nehemiah, as a man of understanding, never lost sight of that.

So, in Nehemiah 6:3, here's what he does. He says, "And I sent messengers unto them saying, 'I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?'" Now, that's not very nice, is it? You get an invitation to dinner, and you respond with: "Listen, I'm doing such a big thing, why would I go down to your rinky-tink party? I mean, let's not be ridiculous:" "Yet, they sent up to me four times in this way, and I saw them in the same manner." So, again and again, he refused to socialize.

**Slander**

Then he had the opposition of slander. Nehemiah 6:5: "Then Sanballat sent his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand, in which was written, 'It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says it, that you and the Jews think to rebel, for which cause you build up the wall, that you may be their king according to these words. And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem saying, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now it shall be reported to the king (that is, to Artaxerxes I) according to these words. Come now, therefore, and let us take counsel together.' And I sent unto him saying, 'There are no such things done as you say, but you invented them in your own heart.' For they all made us afraid, saying, 'Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it is now done. Therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.'"

**Falsehoods**

The next attack of Sanballat and Tobiah was: "We're reporting back to Artaxerxes that we have received word through secret sources that the reason you're building this wall is so that you can rebel against the king, and that you can make yourself the king of Judah. And that is your plan. Come on down. Let's talk it over."

**Conspiracy**

Then there was the opposition by conspiracy. Nehemiah 6:10: "Afterward, I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of the Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut in and said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. And let us shut the doors of the temple, for they will come to slay you; in the night they will come to slay you.' And I said, 'Should such a man as I flee? And who is there who, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life. I will not go in.' And lo, I perceived that God had not sent him, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me, for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore, he was hired that I should be afraid, and do so in sin, that they might have a matter for an evil report with which they might reproach me.'"

Sanballat and Tobiah sent this man to Nehemiah, and he said, "Nehemiah, I'm coming to tell you, they've got a conspiracy. They hired a hit man to get you. The syndicate has hired a hit man. They're out to get you. And I would suggest that you get into the temple and close yourself in because you'll be safe in the temple." And Nehemiah, because he was a man of understanding, realized that this, too, was a falsehood; that this, too, was a con; and, that this, too, was a thing such that they were trying to get him to act in such a way that he would be discredited in the eyes of the people, and that people would look and say, "What kind of a leader is this who tells us that he is talking with understanding from God, and then he has to run into the temple to hide himself because he's afraid of being killed by these heathen pagans." So, the opposition by conspiracy fell through.

One opposition after another was met by a man of discernment, because he had a line of understanding and communication with God. The inevitable result of all this was "mission accomplished." In Nehemiah 4:6, we read, "So, we built the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half of its height, for the people had a mind to work. That is a great verse. Nehemiah says, "We built the wall. We got it halfway up. We got it closed all around to half the height." The reason was because the people had a mind to work. Great things can be done when God's people turn to and have a mind to work.

Then in Nehemiah 6:15-16, they went up the rest of the way with the wall. So, the wall was finished in the 25 day of the month Elul in 52 days." In 52 days, the wall was rebuilt: "And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard of this, and all the nations that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes, for they perceived that this work was wrought by our God." They finished the wall.

In the process of having to finish the wall, to meet these threats and this kind of opposition, Nehemiah, as a man of understanding, had to come up with one plan after another to meet the situation. One of the most brilliant was that he told the men to put on their weapons, and that they were to work with their weapons next to them. He divided the crew so that half of them worked and the other half stood guard. And he said, "The bugler stays with me." That was the radio man of those ancient times. He said, "When you hear the bugle blow, wherever you are hearing the bugle blow to attack, I want you to stop your work, and everybody converges at that point because that's where they're trying to hit us."

**The Word of God**

Well, the word got back to Sanballat, Tobiah, and their troops, that they had a security system that they were not going to break through. Under these difficult conditions, within 52 days, the great wall around Jerusalem was built unto its complete height. And the interesting thing about this is that Ezra, at this point, joined Nehemiah in establishing a series of Bible classes, which you can read about in Nehemiah 8:1-8. We are told that they brought the book of the Law of Moses; they read it to the people; and, they gave the people an understanding of what they read. Nehemiah 8:8 says, "So, they read in the book of the Law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." They gave the sense. They had a teacher who explained what the Scriptures were saying, and the result was that the people got understanding.

Now I think it is significant that immediately after they secure the wall, they start teaching the people the Word of God. What took them into captivity in the first place? Because they were ignorant of doctrine. That's what exposed them to their enemies. Ezra and Nehemiah say, "We've got the temple rebuilt. The wall is established. Now, let's not make the same mistake again." They got Bible classes going; the people gathered; the people studied; and, the people learned.

Now, the result of this is also rather fascinating to me. In Nehemiah 8:9-12, we see the result of these Bible classes: "And Nehemiah, who is the Tirshatha (that is, the governor), and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, 'This day is holy unto the Lord your God. Don't mourn, nor weep. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law." They were convicted of sin: "Then he said unto them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions onto them for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy unto our Lord. Neither be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So, the Levites stilled all the people, saying, 'Hold your peace (that is, stop your grieving), for the day is holy. Neither be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and to drink and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared onto them."

That is what happens when you learn doctrine. It brings joy into your life. It makes you a happy person. It does not make you a grim-faced individual by any means. When the Jews learned the Word of God again, they realized that they were again on the right track of personal success; personal prosperity; personal well-being; and, national peace. The nation was going to be restored. With their priests and their spiritual leaders, they turned from grieving to rejoicing. Under Nehemiah's understanding, the Jewish people returned to national stability after 70 years of captivity.

**Confession**

We close with Nehemiah 9:1-3: "Now on the 24th day of the month, the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with earth upon them, and the seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. They stood up in their place and read in the book of the Law of the Lord their God, one-fourth of the day, and another fourth part, they confessed and worshipped the Lord their God." For 6 hours (one-fourth part of the day), they read the Word of God. For another fourth part of a 24-hour period (for another 6 hours), they reviewed their history, and they said, "Yes, our fathers were evil here. They were wrong here. We remember Ahab. We remember Jezebel. That was a terrible thing – that sex cult of Baal worship that they brought in." They went down through their history, and they confessed for hour-after-hour to God, as well as their personal evil.

The result of that time of confession and recognition of what the Word of God had done for them, and what it condemned, as the result of the teaching that they had received in these classes, they returned to their national prosperity. It's a wonderful thing to be able to discern where God is leading.

I could tell you some very fascinating stories, within the context of the Berean ministry, of how in times past, we have had men, sometimes on our official boards, who have opposed movements relative to, for example, the property purchases. As you looked at them outwardly, people were impressed that these were men of discernment, but they were men lacking discernment. They were the Sanballats and Tobiahs around us, and they were brought down to defeat, even as Sanballat and Tobiah were brought down to defeat here.

I remember the time of the first property purchase we had. It's the first grade building. We had a deacon who refused to sign the legal papers, because he didn't believe that this church could ever afford to buy a property like that. I was brand new out of seminary, and they had never taught me (in Signing Paper 101) what to do when somebody on the official board suddenly doesn't sign. And I mean, when the lawyer is there, and handing you the pen. It's not before. In those days, I was a lot sweeter than I am now, so, we just acted accordingly, and told the lawyer, "We'll come back." The next week, we had a meeting. I said to this man, "You're out. We have a new man in. We'll be here next week." And we signed the papers. That was the first property.

The second critical strategic piece of property was the parsonage property. And there was a man who considered himself a great and discerning man. He just opposed the purchase of this property, and was very indignant when the congregation said, "We should have this." They bought it. Very shortly after that, we were given this extensive area of property behind us, and there was only one way to get to it. Guess what that way was. The parsonage property had a little passageway that attached to this main campus at the time. We have since expanded. But God was already leading and said, "You've got to get this property now, because it's for sale." We did not know at all that that was going to be our access to the main thing upon which we would be constructing our future.

So, it happens today. Discernment is that precious quality that comes from the Christian who understands the Word of God, and who can see through people and can see through things. You're not going to get it by playing smart. You're only going to get it by learning the Word of God on a daily basis. The intake of doctrine into the mentality of your soul will put you head-and-shoulders above everybody else around you who doesn't have that capacity. Develop your insight and your discernment. The result will be that you'll be nobody's fool, and you won't be making stupid decisions, and asking yourself, "Why in the world did I do that?" You will have the precious quality of discernment.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1982

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