

CO-LABORERS WITH GOD

– *DECEMBER 3RD. – NEHEMIAH 4 –*

**"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong."
– 1 Cor. 16:13.**

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER for Jerusalem and the holy interests centered there continued for months before the answer suddenly came. The king, whom he served as confidential secretary, prepared a banquet, the queen being present as well as Nehemiah and others. Everybody was smiling and joyous, attired in their silks and jewels, but the king noticed that his trusted secretary had a sadness which showed through his smiles. Finding that he was not ill he said that it must be a trouble of heart – and inquired as to what it was. It was a dangerous moment for Nehemiah, for the kings of that time were quite autocratic and capricious. The sadness might have been construed to mean a loss of interest in the king and his affairs, or a hundred things disapproved for such an occasion of rejoicing.

Nehemiah's prayer instantly went up to God for wisdom to know how to answer, for he did not receive the wisdom at once, although he had prayed beforehand. He knew that the Almighty could hear his desires of heart, uttered or unexpressed. He received the needed wisdom for a wise and successful reply, which did not offend the king, but enlisted his interest. He told the king that his sadness of heart was because the home of his fathers was ruined. The result was that the king appointed him special governor of Judea with full authority to attend to the work and to call upon the governors of surrounding provinces for aid if necessary.

WISDOM SHOWN BY METHODS

That Nehemiah was a wise man and no mere dreamer was evidenced in the practical methods he employed. A man of wealth, he

probably financed his own expedition, aside from the retinue of soldiers, etc., furnished by the king. A four-months' journey brought them to Jerusalem. The object of his coming was kept secret. He was merely a visitor for a few days, seeing and hearing. Then by night he made an inspection of the old city walls, particularly the broken parts and the heaps of ruins from which they might be rebuilt. He saw the feasibility of the scheme and outlined in his mind the method. Then he called for the elders and prominent representatives of the people, explained to them his object in coming, showed them his authority from the king and suggested a method for the beginning of the repair work immediately.

He perceived the necessity for great caution, as enemies were on every hand as anxious to hinder them as he was anxious for success. The Samaritans were jealous. They had a rival worship of Jehovah, and Israel's success would seem to imply that God's favor was to the Jews rather than toward the Samaritans. Besides, they all hoped to profit by the poverty and helplessness of the Jews – thinking it not wrong to pillage them as opportunity offered. Nehemiah's plan was approved. The leading men in each quarter of the city joined in the work with the laborers, and each built the wall most nearly in front of his own home quarters. This was a wise plan, for each would be specially interested in having the wall strong in his own neighborhood, and a certain degree of proper pride would attach to the work as a prominent monument of the builder's skill – itself a credit or discredit.

Nehemiah joined in the work with the others, his accompanying servants participating also. His spirit of zeal was an inspiration to the discouraged people, who took heart, and hope began to thrive. Then came discouragement and opposition from the enemies. An attack **[R4912 : page 413]** was even planned, but learning of this, Nehemiah so directed the work that the heads of the families kept an armed watch while the others labored, carrying swords also for self-defense.

When their enemies found that they were prepared, the proposed attack was abandoned and discouragements were resorted to. The effort was laughed at, ridiculed as impossible, and worthless anyhow. Those unused to manual toil soon grew sore and weary and discouraged. The higher the walls grew, the more difficult it was to place the stones and the mortar, and the more stones built into the wall, the fewer suitable ones remained amongst the rubbish. It was a time of testing of faith and loyalty to God. Trials and difficulties are permitted to come to all of God's people for just such testings. The overcomers are developed through various experiences for the Divine service.

"STAND FAST IN THE FAITH"

It may be asked why Nehemiah's faithfulness and courage were tested, and what reward was his. We reply that a reward of character-development follows every good endeavor. The reward of those who lived faithfully in Nehemiah's time differs essentially from the reward of the faithful amongst the followers of Jesus. The latter are promised a share with the Master in His glorious Messianic Kingdom. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom;" "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne." – Luke 12:32; Rev. 3:21.

But Nehemiah could have no share in these Kingdom promises because he lived before the call to the Kingdom – before Pentecost. He and others of his time who displayed faithfulness and loyalty are not personally mentioned by St. Paul in Hebrews 11, but they are undoubtedly included in the list. Of them the Apostle declared, "They had this testimony, that they pleased God." St. Paul declares that they will receive their reward – a share in the earthly phase of the Kingdom, after the Church shall first have her share with the Redeemer in the heavenly phase of the Kingdom, for "they, without us, shall not be made perfect, God having some better thing for us."

St. Paul's words in our text teach the same great lesson of the necessity for character-development on the part of all who hope to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ their Lord. They must watch as well as pray, they must "stand fast in the faith" against the various oppositions of the world, the flesh and the Adversary. They must acquit themselves like men, "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." They must be strongly developed, by trials, difficulties and obstacles overcome in the name of the Lord and with His assistance.

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O! TO BE WILLING!

O! to be willing, willing,
Thy will to do day by day,
Obedient, humble and loving –
O! help me, dear Savior, I pray.
Willing that Thou mightest use me,
As forth with glad tidings I go,
That all who are hung'ring and thirsting
God's mystery now may know.

O! to be willing, willing,
Just to be led by Thy hand;
"A messenger at the gateway,
Only waiting for Thy command;"
Filled with Thy spirit and ready
The message to tell at Thy will;
"Willing shouldst thou not require me,
In silence to wait on Thee still."

O! to be willing, willing,
Whate'er the task may be,

To do it as thou didst, dear Jesus,
That the world Thy spirit may see.
Rather be willing, willing,
That Jehovah on earth be praised,
To surrender all earthly blessings
And walk the appointed ways.

O! to be willing, willing,
Each step to salvation to take,
To suffer with Thee in "the Holy,"
And gladly all sacrifice make.
To walk in the way with rejoicing,
My lamp trimmed and well filled with oil,
And I'll soon hear the voice of the Bridegroom
Saying, "Enter and cease from thy toil."

DR. AGNES HAVILAND.

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