

**T. Austin-Sparks:**

We repeat what we have said in other connections, that we are not writing even an abbreviated biography of the case on hand, nor are we engaging in an exposition of the book bearing his name. Everything is concentrated in the one matter of leadership. There are plenty of other things of importance connected with these men, but we are only concerned with this one factor in these brief messages.

It is necessary, however, to remember the time and occasion which brought Nehemiah into his great calling. It was the time when

The former glory was lost

Assyria and Babylon had devastated people and land and desolation reigned. If Assyria and Babylon represent the power of this world, then, because the people of God had flirted with the gods of this world, the world had been allowed by God to destroy the power of the (once) holy people. Babylon stands for confusion, and the descent from the high spiritual place in which God had placed them, down to an "earth-touch", brought the Lord's people into the grip of a confusion which rendered them helpless and ashamed. Confusion ruled, and where there is confusion ruling, weakness and frustration prevail. The time of this condition was made sufficient — not less not more — to leave those concerned in no doubt whatever that it is a fatal thing to heavenly testimony to descend in spirit to this earth and its ways, even religiously. But having indelibly written the fact in the history of His people, the time had arrived when

God was moving for recovery

For this work of recovery leadership was necessary, and Nehemiah was God's man for the occasion.

Having noted the time and occasion, we have next to take note of the significance of this movement of God.

If Babylon represents the confusion which is ever characteristic of this world — and let it be clearly understood that the mark of the curse that was once imposed upon this earth by God because man chose another god, is ever and always confusion in the peoples and nations of this earth — then God's recovery movement will be for the restoration of distinctiveness. It is not necessary to say that, in every way, Israel was constituted by God a distinct and different race and people. It is a fundamental truth that the people of God are distinct from all others and with God this is a matter of the most serious account. Seventy years of exile and captivity, with all the unspeakable sufferings and distresses are ample evidence of God's serious regard for this basic thing.

The wall of Jerusalem symbolically represented a boundary marking a within and a without, and the gates were the emphasis upon that feature. This feature is definitely referred to in relation to the other great symbolic city, the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The gates represent the councils and judgments which determine the acceptable and admissible and otherwise. They are the strength of right judgment. The wall is the symbol of a distinctive testimony to God in the nations and before heaven. The breaking down of the wall then and the burning of the gates, signified the ruin of distinctive testimony on the part of God's people. This, the significance of Nehemiah and his leadership was that God was on the move to recover that distinctiveness of testimony which was, and is, the only reason and justification for the existence and continuance of God's people.

So Nehemiah and the wall are identical in meaning, and leadership as represented by him, is related to this matter of God's jealousy. The book which bears his name cannot be read without recognition of the fact that God's jealousy had been generated in the heart of this man. Nehemiah was not the man to tolerate mixture and inconsistent elements. In this he was truly like his heavenly Lord. Compromise was intolerable to Nehemiah.

The wall declares in no uncertain language that this thing is of God. Nothing which is not of God has any place here. Read the book again in this light alone, and its message is unmistakable.

Another thing which speaks of the significance of the wall and Nehemiah is divine fulness.

Divine fulness

Jerusalem, in the thought of God, has always carried this symbolic meaning. It was the place of the abundance of God. In its prime it swarmed with people who regarded it to be the greatest honour and privilege to be its citizens (see Psalm 87). The nations brought their wealth into it. The day of Pentecost found Jerusalem crammed and crowded with “men out of every nation under heaven”.

It was meant by God to be a type of the heavenly Jerusalem — the church. And this city, this church — the body of Christ — is said to be “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23).

God never did believe in vacuums. He always believed in fulness. It is His nature and His desire, and He always works toward divine fulness. How much we could bring in here to support this statement! But, alas, in the time of which we are thinking, Jerusalem was empty and desolate, “without form, and void”; a vacuum indeed! So, leadership, as represented by Nehemiah related to divine fulness to be recovered in and for the people of God.

May we interject here a word regarding this condition to-day. The spiritual meagreness, smallness, poverty, and consequent weakness of very many of God’s people is a crying tragedy to-day. For years we have been appealed to by Christians in many places. “We have so little spiritual food in our churches”, they say. There are so many really hungry children of God.

Is this condition to be laid at the door of those who are ostensibly leaders? Let it be said at once that, whatever other purposes require leadership, this one of spiritual fulness is by no means the least. To fail here is to fail in a matter which is of the very nature and heart of God. Men of God, are the people for whom you are responsible in the way of “the fulness of Christ”? Look again at Nehemiah and recognize that the fire in his bones was the fire of God’s concern for His fulness to be available again to His people, and to be characteristic of them. While we speak to the leaders or responsible men, let us say to the people also that it is positively God’s will that you should carry with you the impression above all others that you are wealthy and richly endowed people, that your God is a God of abundance. Be sure that you are availing yourselves of all that is available, and neither neglecting nor despising heavenly food.

As we look again at Nehemiah, another thing should impress us. It is that if we are really in line with that which God is doing at any given time and our hearts are aflame with His own immediate concern, there will be sovereign support given and provision made. To find that support we must be on God’s positive line of distinctiveness and fulness as a testimony to Himself. The question of support is a very acute one in organized Christianity, leading to an endless variety of expedients. Surely, if heaven rules and has all resources, and really wants something, heaven will meet its demands and requirements. Can we not expect and believe for this aspect of Nehemiah’s leadership?

If the work of God is kept in His hands and is not allowed to become earthbound it will have heaven’s support, and, while there will be opposition enough, it will be “finished” in triumph. It is the spiritual life of the Lord’s people, the heavenly Israel which is the demand for such leadership as that represented by Nehemiah. It may not appeal to all, but only to a “remnant”, but with them will be found the satisfaction of satisfying God in the thing nearest to His heart.

In Nehemiah as an example of this needed leadership we have:

1. A man with a heartbreak over conditions.
2. A man with the vision of God’s specific desire and purpose.
3. A man with spiritual initiative governed by instant and meticulous touch with God.
4. A man endowed with true spiritual discretion.
5. A man without compromise, who will not put policy before principle; a man full of holy courage.
6. A man free from personal interests in the work of God.
7. A man gifted with spiritual discernment.

Lord, raise up such men for this needy hour.