**Tactics of Intimidation**

*by Joe Price*

The wall of Jerusalem was "broken down, and its gates (were) burned with fire", bringing distress and reproach upon Israel (Neh. 1:3). Nehemiah, cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, petitioned God for mercy and the king for assistance in rebuilding the wall. Both requests were granted, and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to accomplish the task (Neh. 1-2).

The wall that surrounds the church, "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem", the "general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" ­ a wall of separation between what is common and what is holy ­ is in disrepair today (Heb. 12:22-23; Micah 4:1-4; Ezek. 42:20; 44:23). The incursion of immorality, the proliferation of false teaching, the love of other things and the deterioration of neglect are just some of the things that contribute to the crumbling of the wall that divine truth erects around the city of God, the church of Christ.

The walls of ancient Jerusalem were rebuilt by stone and timber and hard work. The walls of heavenly Jerusalem, the church, will be built up and maintained by doing the hard work of teaching, believing and obeying the word of God: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12); "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). To attempt to build the walls of the church with the mortar of the social gospel, organizational restructuring or any other thing that deviates from the "pattern of sound words" will weaken its defenses and lead to its moral and spiritual collapse.

God continues to look for those who will stand in the gap and build the wall of truth and holiness that protects His people: "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (Ezek. 22:30). He found none in Ezekiel's day, and Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon. In Nehemiah's day, people were found who worked together to rebuild the wall of the city and remove the reproach that had fallen upon the land.

As in Nehemiah's day, God's people must "rise up and build," working hard to close the gaps through which the enemy overruns and overwhelms souls. The reproach of sin among God's people must be removed, and innocent souls must be protected (Neh. 2:17-18; 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:3-6).

Today as then, we must build in faith, knowing that by doing so, "the God of heaven Himself will prosper us" (Neh. 2:20; Rom. 8:31-39).

There were enemies who did not want the wall of Jerusalem rebuilt. They wanted Nehemiah to miserably fail. These opponents did their best to hinder and defeat that noble work. It goes without saying that similar objectives exist today. The tactics of intimidation that were used anciently to try to frustrate and defeat the work of Nehemiah and the Jews are still used today by the enemies of righteousness. Like Elymas, who tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith, there continue to be "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ" who serve darkness rather than light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Nevertheless, the light of God's word will expose every fraudulent claim to divine approval as it illuminates the way of truth (Jn. 3:19-21).

As we work to build and fortify the walls of Zion, it is imperative that we take note and learn from the tactics of intimidation used to obstruct Nehemiah's work, lest we be coerced into ceasing this noble work.

**Scorn**. Derision was heaped on Nehemiah and the Jews as they "set their hands to this good work" (Neh. 2:18-19). They were laughed at, held in contempt, and misrepresented as rebels against the king. Even so today, Christians can expect to "suffer for doing good" by being defamed as evildoers (1 Pet. 3:14-17). Nehemiah responded with the assurance that God would prosper their faithful work. Likewise, we must not faint in doing good (2 Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:9).

**Mockery**. Name-calling has always been in the arsenal of those opposing the truth and the people of God. It is much easier to pin a label on someone than it is to carefully listen to them and discern their words and deeds. Nicodemus knew this when he tried to stay the hasty objections of the chief priests and Pharisees against Jesus: "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" (Jn. 7:51) But, they had already made up their minds: "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (Jn. 7:52). When evil things are falsely said against you, Jesus said to rejoice in your heavenly reward and remember the ancient prophets who received similar treatment (Matt. 5:11-12).

**Conspiracy to cause confusion**. The work of rebuilding the wall continued, and the opponents were enraged (Neh. 4:7). They "conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion" (Neh. 4:8, 11). God's people must remain vigilant against the efforts of those who would creep in unnoticed to wreak havoc against the grace of God and the power of His gospel to save (Jude 3-4; 1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 1:6-10).

**Internal strife**. There was an outcry against fellow Jews who were lending money to their poor brethren with interest, then taking their children as slaves when they could not repay (Neh. 5:1-13; Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38). It is sad, yet true, that God's people are not immune from sinning against one another (Eph. 4:25-32). Such sins give Satan and his army great opportunities to attack the weakened defenses of the saints. While saints bite and devour one another, the forces of error are filled with glee. Division within the church harms our effort to spread the gospel to the lost (Jn. 17:20-21). When we love one another, others will know we are disciples of Jesus (Jn. 13:34-35). We must regularly examine ourselves against the divine standard of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 Jn. 4:7-21).

**Compromise**. The good work of building the wall of Jerusalem is stymied if the attention of those doing that work can be diverted from it. Like Sanballat and Geshem, who wanted to talk with Nehemiah, the opponents of truth can consume our time and keep us from doing the needed work of the kingdom (Neh. 6:1-4). Good judgment must be used as to when to shake the dust off of one's feet and move to others who will hear the gospel (Matt. 10:14; Acts 13:44-48).

**Blackmail and lies**. Threats and misrepresentations were leveled against the Jews when earlier attempts to intimidate them into submission failed (Neh. 6:5-9). Take heart when you are falsely accused as you do the work of edifying the people of God in truth; remember Nehemiah. Follow the example of Jesus and do not revile in return; "and do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled" (1 Pet. 2:20-23; 3:14).

**Deception**. False friends with evil motives are used by Satan to try to defeat the work of God (see Neh. 6:10-14). In the name of God they try to make you afraid for being faithful to the Lord. Do not be afraid; do not sin (Neh. 6:13; Heb. 13:5-6).

The wall of Jerusalem was finished, because the work was done by our God (Neh. 6:15-16). Do God's work without fear (Phil. 2:12-13). Remain faithful and do not be intimidated (Heb. 10:39).