

## Building The Wall (Part One)

**We ARE the Wall!**

**John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)**

**Given 25-Sep-02; Sermon #FT02-04**

When I last spoke, I mentioned the biblical imagery of a flood as being one of overwhelming evil, as shown in Revelation 12:15. Water's imagery, as far as the Bible is concerned, begins to form in the Noachian flood. In that case it was the water covering and ending overwhelming evil, and thus God's justice is satisfied, and that is good. It is also the Bible's symbol of the Holy Spirit, and is used in baptism; thus it is associated with good in that case too.

The reason I am saying this is because water can be used to symbolize both good and evil things. Whether portraying good or evil depends on the source and the use it is put to. As in Revelation 12, the source is Satan, and the use is to destroy the people of God, and thus it portrays overwhelming evil.

I'm going to shift my metaphors here for just a little bit, and it will become clear as we go through the sermon why I am doing this. Turn to Matthew 13: 18-19, to the Parable of the Sower and the Seed.

**Matthew 13:18-20** Hear you therefore the Parable of the Sower:  
When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.  
But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that hears the word, and anon with joy receives it.

Here "seeds" is used to symbolize words planted in one's mind from which beliefs are formed, and thus conduct results because we all act according to what we believe. A little bit further back, Jesus was speaking in John 6:63, and he said there, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

Now back in thought to Revelation 12:15 where Satan spews a flood out of his mouth. That flood came forth from his mouth and is indicative of *words*

coming out of his mouth. It is a flood of **words** that is being depicted there. It is information. It is spiritual ***mis* information** of overwhelming quantities. This isn't just a gentle rain falling from the sky. This is an overwhelming quantity of water—words, spiritual seeds—being planted in people's minds and being intended by him to form false belief systems and therefore anti-God, anti-life, life-destroying conduct. We are shown in II Timothy 3:1-5 what the fruit of that kind of thing is.

**II Timothy 3:1-5** This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

This is what is produced from the torrent—the flood of spiritual misinformation that comes out of the mouth of Satan the Devil. Because of the electronic delivery systems available to educate people with its tenets, it eventually produces self-centeredness of monstrous, massive, worldwide proportion experienced only one other time in earth's history—that period just before the flood, which is exactly just what Jesus predicted it would be like in the *last days*. It would be like the days of Noah.

There is nobody within the sound of my voice in this auditorium, who grew up in the Israelitish nations, who can honestly claim to have been unaffected by this onslaught of the influence of that torrent of water. The source of that overwhelming flood of information is Satan, and his ultimate purpose is to destroy **YOU!** The rest of the world is already caught in his web, but the fact that God would use that kind of imagery (of a flood almost of worldwide proportion) will show you how hell-bent Satan is on getting **you** out of the Kingdom of God—to condemn you to death.

Satan's narrow purpose is to destroy faith. It is by faith that we live. It is by faith that we stand. If he can destroy that faith, along with it goes godly love, and of course hope, weakened at the very least and maybe also destroyed,

making certain that the nations of Israel will be in confusion as to right and wrong. Justice and equity will wane, and social chaos will ensue as each person feverishly pursues what is right in his own eyes at the moment. That's the tricky part of these things that came forth from out of the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, because it turns everybody in on themselves. "Men shall be lovers of their own selves." And so truth falls in the street because everybody is determining what is right in his own eyes, only this time on a scale that was never experienced before, except just before the flood.

It directly invaded the Worldwide Church of God through the blurring of the doctrinal standards given through Herbert Armstrong, and the church became a microcosm of what is developing in all of Israel. The church is scattered, and I think in captivity to spiritual Babylon. It is ineffectual and weak. Of course Israel is heading in that same direction. If you see it in the church, it won't be long before it's out in the world as well, and happening there.

With the scattering of the church there is, I think, an interesting parallel to these days following this gradual re-grouping of the church. It is a parallel with a series of events that occurred in Judah about 2500 years ago during the leadership of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Not all of these men were alive at the time that this event I'm eventually going to focus on occurred, but they all played a role in producing it. Judah had reached a nadir of their national relationship with God, and so God raised up Jeremiah at a very young age to proclaim His dismay with what was going on, and to declare His judgments against them. Things were so bad, even in the time of Isaiah, who lived about 120 years or so before Jeremiah, that Isaiah was moved to write this regarding Judah.

**Isaiah 1:2-9** Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, for the LORD has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people does not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole

heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion [a type of the church] is left as a cottage [a remnant] in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

But God was patient still, even as Isaiah lived. But Judah grew steadily worse. There was no national repentance. It was so bad by Jeremiah's time that Jeremiah was told twice by God not to pray for them—once in Jeremiah 11:14, and again in Jeremiah 14:11.

**Jeremiah 11:14** Therefore pray not you for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.

This doesn't mean that God wouldn't hear the sound of the words. It means that He wouldn't listen even though they cried out to Him.

**Jeremiah 14:11** Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.

If we had read more verses around Jeremiah 11, He said there that Judah had as many gods as they had cities. They had, according to the number of their streets, set up altars, and their false prophets were prophesying lies in His name.

Now despite God's extreme displeasure with them, His purpose nonetheless was to continue. The Messiah was yet to come. The church was yet to be built. Israel and Judah and the Gentiles were yet to be saved. God told Jeremiah, between Jeremiah 25:11 and Jeremiah 29:20, that Judah would be scattered in captivity and would serve the Babylonian king seventy years. (You might think of Judah here as being a type of the church, because they are used in that regard. The church is scattered.)

**Jeremiah 25:11** And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

**Jeremiah 29:20** Hear you therefore the word of the LORD, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Following the seventy years, they would be released because Babylon would be made desolate, and then the Jews would be free to return to Judah once again as free men.

Babylon was defeated in October 539 BC by Cyrus, the Persian king. Because of that, the dating of some of these things can at least be reasonably accurate. I'm not going to pay a great deal of attention to the dates, but I just want to show you that there were gaps, there were periods of time between one event and another. So even from the time He made that pronouncement through Isaiah, still another 120 years or so went by. He then told Jeremiah, and still more time went by. He even told us that one period of time would be seventy years long.

So if we again make a parallel with the church, I think that we can understand that since God works in patterns, that there are going to be gaps, there are going to be periods of time between one event and another. I think that it has taken five-twelve years for the church even to become as cohesive as it is now, but it's been 16 years since Herbert Armstrong died. Time is going by between events.

We're going to be spending a little bit of time in the book of Ezra.

**Ezra 1:1-2** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and he has charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Here is the pagan king being used by God to issue a decree that would begin to set the Jews free. This occurred probably in 538 BC that he issued this decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Before that year was out, a small retinue left Babylon for Jerusalem under Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest.

**Ezra 1:5** Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

**Ezra 2:2** Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua . . . [the first two mentioned here].

There is a sad and alarming statistic connected to this. Of the proud nation of millions who went into captivity, only a small remnant returned to Jerusalem.

**Ezra 2:64** The whole congregation together [of the ones returning to Jerusalem] was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore.

There were 42,360 people who returned. The rest chose to remain in Babylon where they had put down roots and felt very much a part of it. In fact there were so many that were left there, that by the time we get to the time of the apostles in the First Century, Peter has gone there to preach the gospel to all the Israelites who were there. He even wrote one of his letters from Babylon. All of these people, except for the 42,360, chose to remain in Babylon where they put down roots. They felt very much a part of it, and that was now home to them. Metaphorically, brethren, they were *permanently* back in the world.

We've had a similar response following the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God. It seems as though many— *most* —of the people (we'll say somewhere around 150,000 as a round number) who were associated with the Worldwide Church of God have disappeared. And now there is only somewhere between, I think, twenty or thirty thousand people that are together in scattered little groups. The rest seem to have gone " *permanently*

"back to the world. I say "permanently" in quotes, because this isn't over yet. God isn't done, and who knows what He is going to work down the road with some of those people. But at the present time it looks as though they are gone from the fellowship.

We can see in Ezra 3, verses 1 and 4 that the Jewish remnant that returned to Jerusalem kept the Feast of Tabernacles.

**Ezra 3:1** And when the *seventh month* had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

**Ezra 3:4** They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required.

This shows that the remnant which returned to Jerusalem at least had some measure of truth that they were keeping. They certainly did not have it all, as we understand, but nonetheless enough truth was there that they were able to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. They began almost immediately to rebuild the destroyed Temple.

**Ezra 3:8** Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem: and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

**Ezra 3:10** And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

This could not have been any later than about 536 BC. They immediately ran into resistance from the people of the land—the people who were left there

following the initial captivity. The returned Jews became discouraged. They turned their attention away from rebuilding the Temple and toward their own personal pursuits. Of course this is always a possibility for us.

There was a lull for about fifteen years or so in which nothing was done toward completing the building. Toward the end of that fifteen-year period (which was sometime around 520 BC to 518 BC) Haggai came on the scene and successful efforts were made to complete the rebuilding.

**Haggai 2:3-4** Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong all you people of the land, says the LORD, and work: for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts.

**Zechariah 4:8-10** Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house: his hands shall also finish it: and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me unto you. For who has despised the day of small things? For they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven: they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

They put the Temple together, but it was dingy by comparison to the magnificence of Solomon's, and many of the people despaired, because it in no way reflected the power and the glory of the first Temple. Even though the Temple was, in a fashion, up and in operation, the Jewish community drifted again for a period of another sixty years.

I want you to just think about the Church of God as you and I know it, and I think you would have to say that the church today is *dingy* by comparison to the glory that we had under the Worldwide Church of God—I mean at least by outward appearance. I'm not saying that the Worldwide Church of God was perfect, righteously, spiritually, and everything at all, but just by comparison let's say even to the measure of the work that was being done during those periods of time. We leave an awful lot to be desired.



In the days of Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and Haggai, they got things up and running. Things were working, but they went through a long period after that before anything else began to get accomplished once again. Turn now to Ezra 7:1, because now the next prime mover is ready to come on the stage here.

**Ezra 7:1** Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, . . .

**Ezra 7:6** This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

**Ezra 7:10** For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

**Ezra 7:23-26** Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. And you, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God, that is in your hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of your God: and teach you them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

Ezra's role was to get the people straightened out doctrinally and to begin to motivate the people once again to seriously devote themselves to obedience to God. As Herbert Armstrong once put it, "to get the church back on the track." Ezra's job was to get the Jews back on track. There was a 60-year lull in which virtually nothing was done.

When it says that "Ezra was a ready scribe," it means that he was quick of mind, and that he was skilled. We would say today, "He was really sharp!" He grasped things quickly and saw do-able solutions to complex issues. He also came equipped with money and with both civil and religious authority to do his job. That's why I read the end of that chapter to show what he came with.

You will find that in reading through Ezra, from the time he arrived, there is virtually nothing mentioned about any *civil* accomplishment. Undoubtedly some things were accomplished, but his main thrust was to get things moving in the right direction spiritually, and he made his name that way, and he is considered by the Jews *second only to Moses* in importance to them spiritually.

The stage was now set for the arrival of Nehemiah, who like Zerubbabel, was a civil leader. Nehemiah did not come until 444 BC. And I'll tell you, he was quite a man! He seemed to be everything that anyone would want in a civil leader. He was a deeply spiritual man who was wise, tactful, and above reproach in his character, burning with zealous energy to do the right thing. He was sacrificing in his leadership. He was a man of vision, and he was courageous.

Nehemiah was probably sent partly to relieve Ezra of civil responsibility, thus leaving Ezra free to concentrate his efforts on purely spiritual matters. It became Nehemiah's job to build the wall around Jerusalem and to complete the Second Temple.

Walls are mentioned fairly often in the Bible. They were a dominating and impressive component of any city at that time. Usually a city was built on a hill, and from a distance the walls were the most obvious feature. In fact, a person in Old Testament times would find a city without any walls to be an absolute incongruity. It would be something that you just would not do, to build a city without a wall.

**Psalm 48:12-14** Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark you well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that you may tell it to the generations following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

This passage does not have the word "wall" within it, but what is being described here are those things that were mounted *upon* the wall, and it speaks lovingly of Jerusalem's wall. I want you to keep this in mind, that walls were costly to build. They had to be continually repaired and maintained. They required a great expenditure of resources and energy to build, and more often than not the city folk—those who were going to be enclosed within the walls—were usually taxed and pressed into labor for their construction.

Walls are thus shown in the Bible as a source of pride, a symbol of beauty. Any city without them is considered to be incomplete. They indicate civilization, as opposed to barbarism, as being settled, contrasted to being ruthless. Even the Temple that is described in the book of Ezekiel has walls about it, and you would think that walls wouldn't be needed at that time. Do you know what? In Revelation 21 the walls in "New Jerusalem" are mentioned about eight or ten times.

From this point in this sermon, I'm going to concentrate for a while on a wall's *spiritual* symbolism because I believe that we are in our time of building *our* walls. It may have been going on for years already, but I think it's time that we really begin to get focused on it. I might refer to you a very fine article that appeared in the *Forerunner* a couple of years ago. Biblically, a wall is directly related to two spiritual necessities. Let's go back to the book of Ezra once again.

**Ezra 9:9** For we were bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

It really wouldn't be a city until the wall was there, despite the fact that the Temple was there, and it was rebuilt. The wall was really, in one way, the last thing to be built. Again, considering the parallel here, the church is in a sense together. We are together in groups, but is our wall up? By the very fact that there is a wall in place, it does two things at the same time. It defends us from those who are on the outside, and it separates us *away* from those who are on the outside. There is defense and separation. We had a whole split sermon yesterday on separation.

We're going to go back to Exodus 13 and just pick up something there so you will see what occurs when a wall is in place.

**Exodus 13:21-22** And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way: and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

**Exodus 14:19-20** And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel, and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these; so that the one came not near the other all the night.

Do you see the picture here? That pillar of fire became a *wall* between the Israelites and the Egyptians who were pursuing them. It protected the Israelites on the one side, and it separated them away from those who were attacking them. So we have there two things: defense and separation.

Let's bring this back to Nehemiah again. The wall was to go around and protect the Temple, which is a symbol of the church. It was also to protect and separate the entire city of Jerusalem, which is also used in the Bible as a symbol of the church. In addition to that, it is also separating and protecting all the inhabitants of the city who equate with those who are *members* — those who are part of the body of Jesus Christ.

**Job 1:9-10** Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Does Job fear God for nought? Have not you made an hedge about him [In this case the wall is a hedge, or described as a hedge], and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

This clearly illustrates a wall's purpose. In this case it is not pictured as holding up anything. The kind of wall that we are describing is not holding up any building or anything. It is just standing there, separating and defending at the same time. It's not holding up anything. It is a defense protecting Job and his possessions, as well as a structure separating him from those attempting to take from him. In this case it happened to be Satan and his demons who are the spiritual marauders.

God erected the wall to protect Job from those that he was unaware of by his senses. He couldn't see them. He couldn't feel them, touch them, taste them, smell them, or anything. They were demons that were after him. What God did for Job He will do for us. Do you want to be protected from demons? Listen to this sermon!

We're going to carry this a little bit further.

**Psalms 34:7** The angel of the LORD encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them.

I want to touch on this because you will find many places in the Bible which tell of God protecting His people. Psalm 91 is a good one, and Psalm 121 is another good one. You will find in the days of Elisha that God revealed an entire army of angels surrounding Elisha and his servant Gehazi, protecting them. In Hebrews 1 it clearly states that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation, and one of their jobs, one of their responsibilities, is to protect us. God is a wall. Angels are a wall, protecting us.

But there is more to the story. There are also times when God, for His purposes, may **break down** a wall, and He has clearly done this.

**Isaiah 5:4-5** What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: ***I will take away the hedge thereof***, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down.

When God tears down a wall, as He did with Job, the separation and protection no longer exists. Those who are on the outside pour in. Those on the inside are eaten up, or as we might say, "cleared out." In other words, broken down, scattered, and/or destroyed.

God did this to Israel. He broke down the wall before them and allowed the Assyrians to pour in. He did the same thing to Judah about 115 or 120 years later, clearing the way for Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonia to come pouring in. I believe He did the same thing to the church using the Tkach gang through false doctrines; and thus the destruction of many people's faith. In so doing, brethren, He began exposing ***us*** to our weaknesses. This is very important.

God is our wall. He and His angels are our wall. If God is not in our life, or if He is only ***weakly*** in our lives, and the wall is broken down for whatever reason, we become exposed to all that is on the outside, and it begins to become poured in. ***THEN*** we find out how strong we are, ...and we're pretty weak. Very weak. It is like when Israel and Judah were scattered.

There are quite a number of paradoxes in the Bible. A paradox is a seemingly contradictory statement, but is nonetheless true. For example, God says that He will circumcise our heart; but paradoxically, He also says we have to circumcise our *own* heart. On the one hand He says He will save us, but paradoxically He also says that we have to save ourselves. On the one hand He says that He will cleanse us, but on the other hand He says that we must purify ourselves. He says that keeping the law will not save us, but on the other hand, all those who are saved will be keeping the law. He says that He will put a wall around us, but paradoxically He will also say that ***we must build our own wall***.

In each paradox case God is implying that there is a condition to His sincere willingness to do what each of the first statement says He will do. That condition, in every case, is that we will give our cooperation by not resisting Him as He is building, because the kind of construction He is doing is no simple task, and it doesn't require just a moment in time.

In general, yielding in obedience is our means of building our wall. In the case of building the wall around Jerusalem and the Temple this is clearly shown, because those people had to work, and work hard, as they yielded to the administration of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah is a type of Christ in an administrative role, administering directions to His body, preparing them for His kingdom. The Jews had to do their building of the wall with a great deal of additional anxiety because of the threatening pressures put on them by the people of the land. They were in a race against time because events were closing in on them, and they needed to get that wall erected in order to provide the protection from attack and separation from those threatening.

**Nehemiah 4:1-13** But it came to pass that when Sanballat heard that we built the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. Hear, O our God; for we are despised [Nehemiah says]: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out from before you: for they have provoked you to anger before the builders. So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: [It was half high.] for the people had a mind to work. But it came to pass that when Sanballat and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth. And conspired all of them together to come and

to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. [These people were going to have to endure to the end despite their tiredness, despite the pressures and distresses.] And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence you shall return unto us they will be upon you. [Now come the tactics from Nehemiah!] Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

Nehemiah had a lot of wisdom in doing this. Do you know where he put the people? The people who were building the wall had to build it in front of the very people they were protecting and who meant the most to them: their families. He knew that would give them extra incentive.

**Nehemiah 4:14** And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not you afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

How were they going to fight? By building the wall! Do you people want to protect your family?

**Nehemiah 4:15-20** And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shield, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded,



everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. [They were ready, on guard, tuned in all the time.] For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. [They were alert.] And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore you hear the sound of the trumpet, resort you thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

In other words, Nehemiah said, "If I blow the trumpet, all of you come running, and everybody defend this one part of the wall."

**Nehemiah 4:21-23** So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

They were ready and alert all the time. Our situation has not reached the critical mass that theirs was in, but at very least, I think brethren, we are in the preliminaries. Like them, we cannot afford to waste time. Our wall is not a literal physical wall to protect and separate us from the surrounding world, but it is nonetheless a literal *spiritual* wall consisting of the character to resist the surrounding world.

I want you to reflect a bit on the message I gave on Sabbath regarding how we came to be this way. The world has had a very great impact on us for many years long before we were even remotely aware of it, and it has been influencing our thinking, and it continues to this day. We had little protection from its subtle persuasion until God ***changed*** our perspective and enabled us to come to see at least some of the cruel hardships with which it was burdening us and others. Even then, it continues to influence us to this day, and so we must throw up a wall to protect ourselves from it, and at the same time sever us from the world.

Now I want to repeat the reading of some verses that are very important to us in this regard in II Corinthians 6:14-18. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it. I just want to remind you of what Paul wrote.

**II Corinthians 6:14-15** Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has he that believes with an infidel?

Brethren, can you see there is a separation between us and them?

**II Corinthians 6:16-18** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, [He's not dwelling in them.] and walk in them; [He's not walking in them.] and I will be their God, [He's not their God] and they shall be my people [and they are not His people]. *Wherefore* [here comes the concluding statement] come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

He has not named yet what it is that really separates us, but I told you it's a literal wall. It is a literal *spiritual* wall.

**II Corinthians 7:1** Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves [Now here comes the erection of the wall] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting *holiness* in the fear of God.

**HOLINESS** is the wall!

If you think this is not important, I want you to look in Hebrews 12:12.

**Hebrews 12:12-14** Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet [Watch the way you walk], lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, *without which NO MAN shall see the Lord* .

If we don't have holiness, brethren, we will crumble before all of the invaders. They will eat us up! They will clean us out. They will destroy us.

We're going to go back to the Old Testament again. Eventually we'll get back to Ezra and Nehemiah, but first I want you to turn to the book of Ezekiel. We're going to read some verses from chapter 2, and chapter 22, because I want to give you a preface and a bit of a proof here.

**Ezekiel 2:1-7** And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak unto you. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. And he said unto me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send you unto them: and you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord God. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with you, and you do dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And you shall speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.

The book of Ezekiel is written to Israel. Now is Judah included? Certainly it is, but the interesting thing is that when this book was written Ezekiel was *among* the children of Judah. He was a captive along with fellow Jews. This

book is written to those who had already disappeared into the folds of history 120 years before, to the *rebellious house*—Israel: the ten northern tribes.

To me that makes this book particularly important because it was written 125 years after Israel had already gone into captivity and disappeared as far as secular history is concerned. But we know where it is, and that you are a portion of it. Therefore this book of Ezekiel is addressed to *US* who are living in the *rebellious house*. It is for us and the end-time, because this book never got to those people of Israel. It got to the Jews undoubtedly, because Ezekiel spoke it to them, but it never got to the *rebellious house*—*Israel*. (Incidentally, He said "that rebellious house" three or four different times.)

Now we're going to read Ezekiel 22, and as we read I want you to understand that what God is doing here is giving us a brief generalized description of what we are living in.

**Ezekiel 22:25-31** There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things; they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shown difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus says the Lord GOD when the LORD has not spoken. The people of the land have used oppressions, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out my indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, says the Lord GOD.

In this paragraph God addresses four "P's": prophets, priests, princes, and people. He covers the whole of society. This society is so far from truth, so immorally rapacious in conduct, so carnal in spirituality, He could do nothing except consume them, as He says, "with the fire of His wrath."

Another thing I want us to notice is that God said He wanted a *man* to make a hedge, or a wall, and He wanted a man to stand in the gap for the benefit of the land. The implication of this statement is two-fold. We have already seen that a man can *build* the wall, but now we can see that a man can *be* the wall where he stands.

**Jeremiah 1:10** See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

There basically is Jeremiah's commission.

**Jeremiah 1:17-19** You therefore gird up your loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command you: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound you before them. For, behold, *I have made YOU* this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and *brasen walls* against the whole land [Jeremiah is to *become* a wall], against the *kings* of Judah, against the *princes* thereof, against the *priests* thereof, and against the *people* of the land. And they shall fight against you: but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you.

Jeremiah would be a wall, as if he was part of a fortress, protecting and separating the truth of God from total destruction in Judah.

**Jeremiah 15:20-21** And I will make you unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you: for I am with you to save you and to deliver you, says the LORD. And I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible.

There is just a slight change of wording here to assure Jeremiah, though he was a wall being pounded upon by the people's stubbornness, that he nonetheless would be saved. Again brethren, what God would do for Jeremiah, He will also do for you and me. But we have a paradox here, and that is that even though God said, "Jeremiah, you're going to be a wall," Jeremiah had to make the effort to *be* a wall. So both have their part.

We could go on reading and reading, and I'll tell you, it could really start looking hopeless, but I want you to turn to Ezekiel 9—to a very encouraging chapter.

**Ezekiel 9:1-11** He cried also in my ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate which lies toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in and stood beside the brasen altar. And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his side; And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in my hearing, Go you after him through the city and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have you pity [that is, as the punishment really begins to come down]. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark: and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house. And he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go you forth. And they went forth and slew in the city. And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God will you destroy all the residue of Israel in your pouring out of your fury upon Jerusalem? Then said he unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the

land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The LORD has forsaken the earth, and the LORD sees not. And as for me also, my eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head. And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as you have commanded me.

Now there is a remnant which is not in the rebellious state, and those He will spare. It isn't directly stated, but the implication is that the mark in the forehead becomes the symbol of the wall of protection separating them from the slain.

I am about three-quarters of the way through my sermon, but I think this a good place to stop. God willing, I will continue it, because there is more to come regarding the wall. To me personally, the part that we have in building our wall and in *being* a wall is very exciting. We will continue to build that, God willing, the next time I speak.