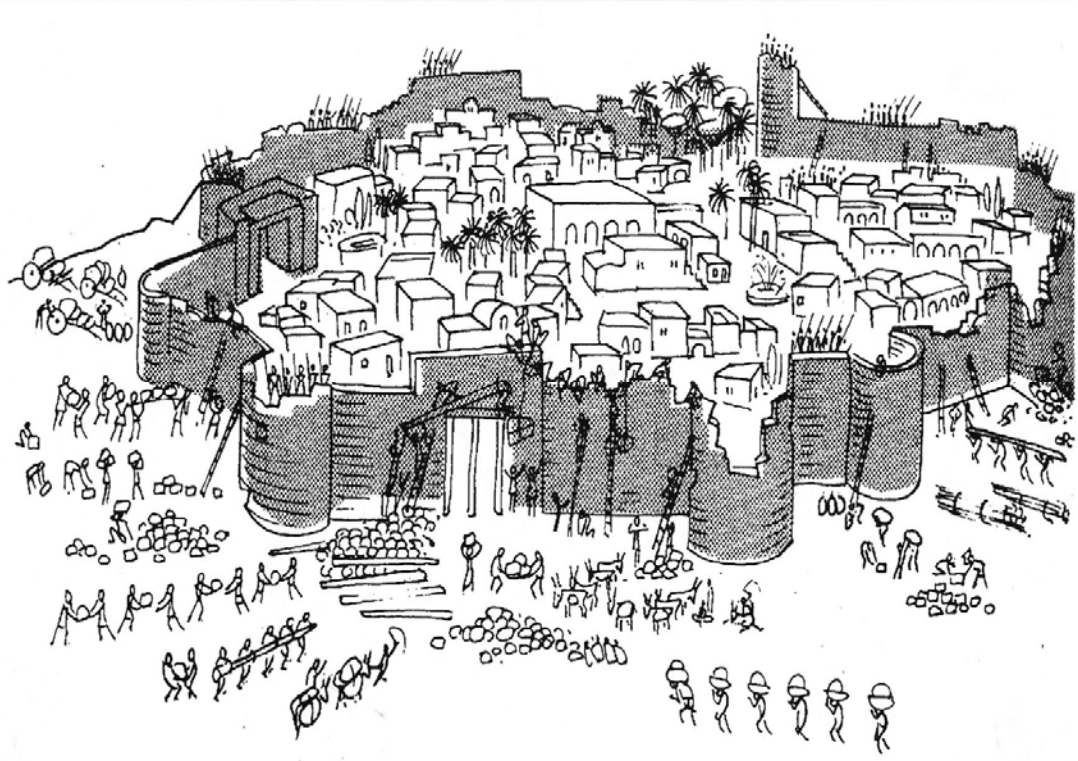
“Doing a great work” for God in the Muslim World principles from The Book of Nehemiah



Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study One

1. **Introduction**
   - **a) A brief historical background**
   - **b) The purpose of this study**

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   Preparation of the heart
   - **a) You need to be called of God**
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3. **Concentrated prayer – rooted in faith** (1:4-11)

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   - **a) prayer and planning**
   - **b) a door opened by God**
   - **c) assurance of being:**
     - *** sent**
     - *** safe**
     - *** supplied**

Summary

- **Information**
- **Prayer**
- **Vision**
- **Planning**

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study One

1. Introduction

"Doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World is not easy! But God has taught us a great deal about the subject in His Word. We must learn to apply this to our circumstances and experience. Let us look at some of the principles God has given us in the first six chapters of Nehemiah.

a) A brief historical background

- Jerusalem was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians in 586/7 BC.
- Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians in 530 BC.
- Cyrus, king of the Persians, encouraged the exiled people of God to return to Palestine.
- Only a small remnant returned – about 50,000.
- They set about re-building the temple – the second one.
- There was only slow progress – Haggai and Zechariah were sent by God to encourage them.
- The temple was finished ~ 514 BC but was not used.
- In 458 BC Ezra came and temple worship and sacrifices were re-instated – i.e. 60 yrs after the second temple was started. There were some attempts to re-build the walls. These were blocked. (Ezra 4:7-16, 23)
- The walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins and the community of believers was very unstable. They lived in fear and had very low confidence levels.
- The population was low and scattered.
- The Book of Nehemiah is one of the greatest autobiographical "memoirs" of ancient history.
- In Nehemiah (ch. 1-6) the focus is on the re-construction of the walls and in chapters 7-13 the focus is on the re-instruction of the People of God.

b) The purpose of this study

- To discover the principles of "Doing a Great Work" for God – especially in the context of a small minority trying to survive, thrive and worship God in a sea of enemies.
- The focus will be on Chapters 1-6.
- There is a wall to be built:
  * around your own personality and spirit
  * around the small church in the Muslim World
  * around the whole Kingdom of God
- So the wall is individual, corporate and global
- The principles of "wall building" in Nehemiah are clear:

No winning without warfare
No opportunity without opposition
No victory without vigilance

- Where there are no walls in the person, the church or the world, there is:
  * prayerlessness
  * procrastination
  * lack of discipline
  * spiritual laziness – little time spent with God
  * moral compromise, lust and rebellion

2. Preparation for "doing a great work" for God (Neh. 1:1-11)

Preparation of heart

a) You need to be called of God to do it!

- **His position** (v. 1)

  Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC – son of Xerxes who took Esther to be his Queen). Persia was the dominant world power of the day although they were having some trouble with the Greeks. A 'cup bearer' was a position of trust requiring integrity and loyalty. It was more than just serving wine. It was more like head of palace security. Notice that he had a "secular" job. In our terms he was a 'tentmaker' serving God in a cross-cultural situation!

- **His interest** (v. 2-3)

  This was the welfare of the People of God – 800 miles away. It was this interest that lay at the root of his calling. The **evidence** of God's calling on your life is an interest in 'the work'. This is what gives rise to **a vision** of need and a vision of potential provision. We need to have information:

  * His source of information was Hanani, one of the brethren. What are our sources?

  * He was seeking information – actively pursuing an investigation.

  * Note the specific nature of the information (v. 3). He learned that the people were suffering and the city was in a state of desolation.

b) Your concern needs to turn into action:

- Nehemiah's concern was for God's people who were in such a tragic situation – like the Muslim World today.
- Nehemiah knew of God's intention for His People to be a light to the nations (Is. 40-55).
- What he saw was their failure **to be** what God had promised!
- God's People – few, scattered, frightened, intimidated – were 'at home' but still in bondage. This is the church in much of the Muslim World.
- Although Nehemiah lived in a palace, he wasn't a victim of a dream world, an ivory tower of his comfort zone!

What was the result of his concern?

(i) He wept (v. 4)

There is no apathy here. There is no indifference such as we see in the people of our day who are often not moved by the needs of the world. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41). Paul wept over his people (Phil. 3:18).

PRINCIPLE ONE
You will never be used by God to "do a great work" and bring blessing to others – to pioneer a work of God – until God has opened your eyes and made you see things as they really are.

- Nehemiah was called to build the walls – but first he has to see the ruins.
- We must learn to survey the ruined walls and broken gates and weep.
- The response of the average person would have been to blame the people for failing to organise themselves and put up their own walls.

The walls of Jerusalem were symbols of salvation and the gates were symbols of praise.

What about your walls?

- **As an individual?** How is the wall of your:

  * Prayer life and Bible study?

  * Walk with God?

  * Witness? Is it consistent?

- **As a team/church?** How is the wall of your (collective):

  * Praise and worship?

  * Corporate holiness?

  * Witness into the community in which you are living – the "breaking out of the Kingdom" in your country?

What is the state of the walls in the eyes of God? Are they in ruins? Are you weeping?

Globally: What about the wall of our worldwide effectiveness and impact in the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim Worlds? So often immorality, materialism, woolly theology and much else ruins this wall!

Nehemiah wept! Are you weeping?

(ii) He prayed

- Sadness led to a determination to change the status quo
- Weeping led to work
- He didn't look to the king for help but to the King of Kings – the Lord God of Heaven

3. Concentrated prayer – rooted in faith (v. 4-11)

Nehemiah acted in the capacity of a priest who stood before God and offered up his own sins and the sins of his people in repentance. He interceded on behalf of his people that God would fulfil His promises to His people.

The tendency today is to avoid involvement! Note:

- **The pray-er's burden** (v. 4)
  This is no obligation – no ritual praying! Nehemiah is moved to the depths of his being.
- **It was a prayer of praise**
  Nehemiah knew the attributes of the God he addressed. He knew God's greatness and majesty and was challenged to believe and to worship and praise. He knew God's "terribleness" and this caused him to have reverential fear. He knew God's faithfulness to His Word and so was challenged to ask on this basis. He knew God's mercy and was challenged to approach Him on this basis (Heb. 11:6).
- **It was a continual prayer** – a prayer of importunity (v. 6)
  He prayed before the Lord night and day for 4 months – December to March/April. It was not impetuosity that caused him to speak to King Artaxerxes I. He wanted to make sure **God** was calling **him**. He was praying God would either take away his burden or deepen it. Month after month passed and there was no answer – four months of sorrow!

- **It was a prayer of confession** (v. 6-7)
  Nehemiah identified himself with his people. National sins were confessed and individual responsibility faced:
  * dealing falsely with God
  * disobedience to God
  * disregard of God's law

  We need to approach God on the basis of confession that our need is basically caused by unbelief.

- **It was a prayer rooted in the past and rooted in God's promises** (v. 8-10)
  Nehemiah's thoughts turned back to the great deliverance from Egypt. He based his prayer on God's past dealings with His people and God's promises to them. His prayer was based on the 'redemptive status' of the children of God. (Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 2:9)
  * He holds God to His Word. God delights to be held to His promises. This takes faith – a childlike confidence that says, *"Daddy you promised!"* God cannot deny Himself and when there is so much of Himself involved in this prayer, He must answer.
  * He reminds God of His redemptive work on behalf of the nation to begin with (v. 10) – their cost to Him!

- **It was a prayer of request and consecration** (v. 11)
  Nehemiah wants to have the blessing and guidance of God as he goes before the king. This is putting his faith into action in preparation.

PRINCIPLE TWO
You will never "do a great work" for God unless it is birthed out of prayer.

- However ruinous the situation, we can ground our prayers on:
  * the Cross – Christ's blood shed and its efficacy
  * the empty tomb
  * Our ascended and reigning Lord
- Prayer is not prattle. It is warfare.
- Real prayer is rooted in the promises of God and based on the 'Covenant of Blood'.
- Take a long look at Jesus – His triumph on the Cross and the fact that He is in the midst of the throne **now.**
- Do this before you pray! Then you will pray in faith.
- There will be no mighty answers to prayer without faith.
- You will be attacked by doubt. You must learn to resist.
- You must have an undaunted spirit that doesn't stagger at the promises of God.
- Faith looks away from self and away from circumstances to the omnipotence of our Living God and His commitment to the covenant promises He has made to us.

Why is prayer so crucial?

It disengages us from **our** mind, **our** thoughts and **our** will and sets in motion **God's way** by:

- Making us wait
- Clearing our vision
- Quietening our hearts
- Activating our faith

PRINCIPLE THREE
Only a person with a crushing burden and a huge sense of responsibility tested by time, will God choose to entrust with His "great work". This is how vision is birthed.

We need to remember:

- The need does not constitute a call.
- Recognised need must be followed by earnest, persistent waiting on God – then God opens the door.
- If God sees that we are ready to accept the responsibility, then He will open the doors.
- Nehemiah accepted responsibility. He answered the King, ***"Send me to the city of my fathers than I may build….."*** He accepted the consequences of answered prayer.
- People who are going to "do a great work" have learned never to shirk responsibility.
- Is what you sense a burden and a concern from God? If so, expect:
  * **a continuing thought** leading to earnest, continuous prayer
  * **a convicting word** from the Bible confirming the concern
  * **a confirmation** from those you are accountable to and from circumstances

4. The Equipping needed to do a "great work" for God (2:1-10)

Nehemiah wanted to know that:

* He was **sent** (v. 5-7)
* He would be **safe** (v. 7)
* He would be **supplied** (v. 8)

- Nehemiah had **a vision** – a deep concern – and he assumed it was God's will that he should do something about the situation.
- He had carefully thought through **a plan** – what would be necessary to carry out the vision.

Note the following:

a) Earnest, persistent prayer and careful planning are always prerequisites of "doing a great work" for God.

During his 4 months of waiting on God he dreamed, planned, calculated, estimated, and budgeted – i.e. he put the project together.

* He gave the king a definite time concerning his return. He knew how long the job and the journey should take.
* Preparation, planning and faith are all vital!
* Faith is not, "flying by the seat of your pants" – an act that abandons all clear thinking. (see Lk. 14:28-30)

b) God opened the door for the project to start

* It should always be God who starts the work – never us.
* It is God's initiative – not ours.
* Presumption is dangerous. Many a potentially "great work" fails because we initiate it in haste.
* It took great courage on Nehemiah's part. To show stress in the king's presence was likely to arouse suspicions of plot-making meriting instant death!
* The Medes and the Persians were not known for their tolerance and flexibility (Daniel 1:10). Sorrow over sin and judgement is a reproach to the people of the world.
* In difficult and dangerous situations like these God will come to our help.
* Proverbs 21:1 ***"The king's heart is like channels of water in the Lord's hands. He turns it wherever He wishes."***

c) In all this Nehemiah needed to know that he was sent – safe – supplied. (v. 9-10)

* The king was able to give him all these things. Each is essential for doing "a great work".
* He needed to be able to look back to **his commissioning** in dark days in the future.
* He needed to know that every need would **be supplied**.

* This was a reversal of the usual Persian policy (4:17-23).

* He needed to know that he would be able to pass through Jerusalem unhindered – **safe**.

PRINCIPLE FOUR
You need an unshakeable conviction that God has sent you if you are going to do a "great work" for God.

- The dominating factor in Christian work – especially "doing a great work" in the Muslim World – is not the need, but the clear command of the Lord Jesus!
- He has the right to send us because we acknowledge Him as our Lord and Master.
- ***"As the Father has sent me, even so send I you."*** (John 20:21)
- The true source of inspiration in doing a "great work" is always behind you – never in front!
- The fact that we are called – chosen – gives us great stability in our work. It gives us stickability.
- If we haven't been **sent** to do the work we are doing for God today, we had better stop!
- To know that you are sent is part of the answer to discouragement, self-pity and loneliness.
- Moses needed to know that what he was doing was the will of God. ***"If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure ...."*** (Ex. 18:23)

PRINCIPLE FIVE
You have the right to ask to be safe while "doing the great work". Therefore go as a team.

The king gave Nehemiah extra support that he hadn't asked for – army officers and horsemen.

- We have no right to ask to be kept physically safe for we are called to hazard our lives for the sake of the Gospel.
- To be kept spiritually safe? Absolutely yes!!
- Note also that men went with Nehemiah to protect him.
- Never go alone. **Always go as a team**. We need:
  - others to pray with us
  - mutual accountability.
- See Isaiah 25:4-5.

PRINCIPLE SIX
God has promised to supply all the resources you will need – material and spiritual – so that you can complete the "great work" to which He has called you.

See Mt. 6:25-34 and 2 Peter 1:3

"But to everyone of us is given <u>grace</u> according to the measure of the gift of God."

Summary

In the preparation of a worker who is going to do "a great work" for God there are four key concepts:

1. Information

2. Prayer

3. Vision

4. Planning

Lessons:

1. God's call comes to a person after he/she had got information and begun to intercede.
2. God has often already placed a person in a secular situation in order to equip him/her to do His will.
3. God often keeps the one He has called waiting – in a time of testing and preparation.
4. God turns apparently adverse circumstances and dangerous conditions into those that can be used for His Glory and to further the carrying out of His plan.
5. Changing the heart and opening the doors are God's speciality – no matter how important the person.
6. God gives favour in the sight of man to those He has called to "do a great work".
7. Faith is not a synonym for chaos and disorder. Faith and careful planning go hand in hand.
8. All workers are surrounded by the visible and tangible. They must learn to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Vision is crucial!

<u>Agonise</u> in prayer and <u>organise</u> in faith.

Homework

1. Read the book of Nehemiah chapter 1-6

- As you read jot down your initial impressions about the book – reactions, opinions, feelings, questions or whatever
- Go through the first 6 chapters again
- Write down those points that might be appropriate for you in the areas of:
  * motivation
  * dealing with discouragement
  * planning
  * discipline
  * compromise
- Jot these down in a notebook

Nehemiah

Ch.	Verse	comment, initial impression, possible application
1.	1. 2.	

2. Waiting? Disorder? Opposition? Change? Fear? Are any of these relevant to you?

- Changing the heart is God's speciality
  * Can you think of a person you would like to see God change?
  * Have you seen God at work in this way before?
- Faith is not a synonym for disorder
  * Do you replace planning with optimism?
  * Didn't this always produce chaos in the past?
  * What keeps you from trusting and planning?
- Praying and waiting
  * Are you in a waiting situation now?
  * Are you finding it tough?
  * Is it clarifying your vision?

3. There are over 8000 promises for us in the Word of God! Nehemiah began by claiming God's promises. To claim them you must know them! List as many promises as you know.

For example:

Jesus will never forsake me – Heb. 13:5
If I believe in Jesus I will have eternal life – Jn. 3:16

4. Pray using Nehemiah's format:

Praise – Confession – Claiming Promises – Petition

While you are praying think! Is the waiting because it is:

* clearing my vision?
* quickening my heart?
* activating my faith?

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Two

1. **The Reason for the upcoming confrontation** (2:10)

2. **Beginning the Work** (2:11-20)

   a) **Research – a survey** (11-16)

   b) **Co-operation / networking** (17-18)

   c) **Determination (19-20)**

3. **Where to start the work** (3:10, 23, 29, 30)
   (also 1 Cor. 3:11-13)

   a) **Who will do the work?**

   b) **Where to start?**

The Spiritual Implications of Building Walls

- **Jerusalem and the church in the whole world**
- **What are the functions of the walls?**
- **What are we to be on our guard against?**
- **Do we need walls against these attacks?**
- **What walls need to be built?**

5. **The Key : Unhindered Focus**

Appendix: The geography of Jerusalem
A history of the walls

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Two

1. The Reason for the Upcoming Confrontation (2:10)

Sanballat the Horonite (Beth Horon was 8 miles NW of Jerusalem) was the satrap (govenor) of Samaria and Tobiah was the satrap of the area now called Jordan. They were probably upset at their loss of power and influence in Jerusalem and among the Jewish exiles. They knew well Nehemiah's motive – a concern for the welfare of the People of God.

- Nehemiah had no ambitions for power and glory – no desire to get rich – so he gave them no leverage to gain a compromise with him.
- Nehemiah was a marked man.
- There were plenty of others in Jerusalem – some of them leaders – but they had no concern for God's people. They were compromised.
- Nehemiah was a man of vision and prayer with a single aim and purpose. He was sent and supplied.
- There is no battle until a person of vision/prayer pitches in!
- There is no battle until people arrive who are selfless and willing to sacrifice all for the glory of God.
- Does our service for God cause 'the principalities and powers' any worry at all?
- **Face reality**! You are going into battle – visionary, prayerful people going to "do a great work" = declaring war!

2. Beginning the Work (2:11-20)

- Most people in Jerusalem had grown used to the situation and were lethargic and disinterested.
- The walls had been in ruins for nearly 150 years!
- The 'sands of time' had erased any patriotic zeal they might have had.
- Nehemiah had to **motivate** God's people to rise up and carry out a difficult task.
- What about you – especially you who have worked in the Muslim World? Are you getting stale? What progress are you making? Is it really spiritual? Are you being careless in your Christian life? Is there a poverty in your witness?

There are three stages in beginning "a great work":

a) Research – a survey (11-16)

b) Co-operation / Networking (17-18)

c) Determination (19-20)

a) Research / Survey (11-16)

Nehemiah started a thorough investigation of the state of the walls. Note two things about his research:

(i) <u>It was done quietly</u> (11-12)

- Nehemiah did not immediately confer with the people. He didn't start up a committee! In fact he did nothing for 3 days.
- It is dangerous and foolish to wear your heart on your sleeve.
- Do your initial research quietly. Research should be a low profile task.
- Nehemiah made a tour of the city by night while others slept.
- The state of the ruins was so great In places that he had to get off his horse and stumble over the ruins.
- He crossed over the brook (probably Kidron) and saw the sight of the ruins in the moonlight.
- No-one, except the king, knew what he was going to do.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN
Whenever a great work of God is to begin, faithful, burdened people have to do research – not in a library. They have to see the situation for themselves – to weep in the night as they stumble over the ruins in a low profile survey.

- We must know the worst!
- One worker who started "a great work" in New York City said, after the first 6 months in that city, "O God, the sin of this city is breaking my heart!"
- It is folly to believe things are better than they really are!
- We have to be bold enough to look at the facts, know the details, diagnose the problems and obstacles **and then** to rise to the task of **planning** to do the work.
- Remember: incrementalism is the worst enemy of innovation.
- Be radical in your plans.
- Remember: No "great work" until you have a broken heart!
- This is the side of research that never comes to public attention.
- Note: people like Moses, Elijah, Paul and also the Lord Jesus all spent time in solitude.
- Throughout His ministry, Jesus escaped the crowds to get alone.
- Do your research quietly – plan alone.
- It was objective, empirical evaluatiion (13-15).
- Twice the word 'inspect' is used. In Hebrew this is a medical term! It is used of probing a wound to see the extent of the laceration or the disease or to see the extent of the infection.
- Accurate diagnosis gives rise to effective therapeutics.
- Nehemiah is not only researching, he is thinking through a plan:
  - What is needed?
  - What needs to be done first?
  - How can it be organised?
- At this stage never despair! God is sufficient!

b) Co-operation / Networking (17-18)

- Once he had faced the magnitude of the task, Nehemiah saw the absolute necessity of getting other people to help him. So he gave a call to action. He needed to motivate others.
- Notice the pronouns Nehemiah used to motivate people 'we' and 'us' (v. 17).
- He identified the need in joint terms – terms of unity/co-operation.
- He didn't blame them for the state of the walls.
- He didn't motivate them by guilt.
- He gave them **the facts** and issued a clear invitation, *"Come, let us build the wall…"*
- Then he gave them **the reason** for building the walls.
  - **Ruined walls are a shame** to the people, but it was a disgrace not only to the People of God, but to God Himself. **To bring honour to God was the motive** and the inspiration behind the work. The honour of God is **our** major motivation and this motivation gives great 'stickability'!
- He gave them the method – all working together.
  - **The work would be done efficiently**. The work was divided among 42 groups. This "great work" is not only spiritual, but requires efficient delegation – efficient management that eliminates duplication and wasteful use of resources.
  - **Unity** – sharing one purpose, one motivation, one life and one work – produces incredible results.

The Result: They went to work!

> **PRINCIPLE EIGHT**
> **In doing a work for God 'lone-ranger' stuff is out! Build an ethos of internal unity on the team, but also work towards the synergy that comes with co-operation, networking and forming partnerships with other organisations.**

c) Determination (19-20)

- As soon as the plan to rebuild the walls was known, the opposition began!
- The enemy poured in scorn. They despised the work of God.
- Opposition brings the **temptation to be afraid**.
- Scorn is a very powerful weapon – remember Peter's denial!
- You will be laughed at – scorned – told you are foolish and worse! What are you going to do?
- Look at Nehemiah's answer:
  - It was God's work. God was in it.
  - They were the servants of God and God had called them to do this work.
  - He told the enemy they had no reason to be there!
- Nehemiah spoke to the enemy with courage, boldness and authority.
- ***"Be stedfast, unmoveable……"*** (1 Cor. 15:58)
- ***"Be strong and courageous"*** (Josh. 1:9)
- God's work done by God's people will always be brought to completion.
- The enemy has no "rights".

> **PRINCIPLE NINE**
> **There must be strong resolution if a "great work" is to be done. We need to be sure of our authority to do what we are doing. We need to have victory over fear.**

3. Where to Start the Work (ch. 3)

a) Who will do the work?

- Chapter three lists the builders – i.e. who did what.
- The leaders of 42 sections are named.
- All sorts of people were involved in the building:
  - priests (1)
  - the rich (9)
  - the poor (30)
  - the goldsmiths and perfumers! (8)
  - the rulers (12)
  - women (12)
  - Levites (17)
  - merchants (32)

- They were not all from Jerusalem – the Tekoites helped. (Tekoah is about 10 miles south of Jerusalem near the region controlled by Geshem.) They repaired two sections (5 and 27).
- Some worked two sections (11; 19-21; 24; 30).
- Many built the walls near their own houses – i.e. they had a personal interest in the security of a good wall near their own houses! (see 4:14)
- Every person had his/her appointed place.
- There were no shirkers or grumblers – yet!!
- Everyone was happy – there was no friction – yet!!
- They were united for the task. Each person knew what they had to do.
- Behind all this was good planning and good organisation!

Note Nehemiah's Planning

(i) Delegation of responsibility to 42 leaders

(ii) Distribution of the work:
* areas of work defined
* amounts of work apportioned according to capacity

(iii) Desire – they were motivated to work – obviously there was clear communication!

PRINCIPLE TEN
Heterogeneous, multi-talented, multi-gifted (spiritually) teams of people working, with one heart and mind, side-by-side for the sake of the Gospel can be tremendously effective.

b) Where to start the work? ***"He repaired…… by his house"*** **(v. 10).**

- Every real work of God begins at home.
- The disciples began their witness in Jerusalem where they had earlier failed and denied Jesus.
- Note the significance of the names on the list. In Hebrew a man's name was often descriptive of his character.
- A look at four people:

(i) **Jedaiah** (v. 10) His name means **an invoker of God** – he was a man of prayer.
- **A wall of prayer** needs to be built around our home – our family.
- This is a crucial point of spiritual warfare and a key to life in the Muslim World.

(ii) **Hashub** (associate) and **Benjamin** (son of my right hand – there to protect me) (v. 23)
- See Deut. 33:12.
- The blessing of God comes in having an associate/one alongside to protect. This gives freedom from worry, fear and friction.
- This speaks of 'team' in a general sense and also of a 'spouse'.
- We all need "a protector" someone we are closely accountable to.
- It starts "near your house".

(iii) **Zadok** (justice or integrity) (v. 29)
- Build a wall of integrity near your house!
- Zadok was the son of Immer (talkative!).
- Careless, flippant talk and gossip often destroys integrity.
- This reminds us how important it is to guard our tongues (James 3:1-12).

(iv) **Meshullam** (devoted), son of **Berechiah** (the Lord has blessed him) (v. 30)

- He lived in a "bed-sit" or more probably a small hut. He was insignificant in the world's eyes.
- He didn't have a great deal to do – just a little part of the wall.
- His life speaks of absolute devotion.

The wall was continuous. If there is a gap the enemy can break through. There was a united attack on the problem.

So begin at home – rise up and build a wall:

* of prayer for protection
* of purity and integrity
* of group protection in your family
* of passionate devotion

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN
"Doing a great work" <u>starts</u> at home with your own inner spiritual life.
Build effectively <u>there</u>. Never allow this area of your life to fall into ruins.

The Spiritual Implications of Building Walls (For General Discussion)

Is it valid to think of the whole world church as equivalent to Jerusalem?

Augustine – great N. African theologian – thought so and wrote a book called, **The City of God**. If so, where does the local church/house group fit in?

What are the functions of the walls?

There are walls in the "New Jerusalem". Walls have at least two functions:

- They give a sense of community (hence in Revelation).
- They are a defense against external attack (obviously not a need in heaven but very much needed now in the combat zone)!

*** What are we to be on our guard against?**

- Satan – the accuser of the Brethren
- "the world" that hates us (Jn. 16:2-4)
- false teachers
- discouragement – fear – division

*** Do we need walls against these attacks?**

If yes, what is the state of our walls? What will be the result if our walls are in a poor state?

- ***"I have taught you these things to guard you against the breakdown of your faith."*** (Jn. 16:1)
- ***"Guard your hearts and your minds."*** (Phil. 4:7)
- ***"Guard the truth entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells in you."*** (2 Tim. 1:14)
- Also see: 1 Sam. 2:9 – Ps. 141:3 – Prov. 2:11; 4:13; 4:23; 7:2; 13:3; 19:16; 22:5 – Mk.13:33 – Lk. 12:1; 12:15 Acts 20:31 – 1 Cor. 16:13 – 1 Tim 6:20

*** What are the walls that need to be built?**

➢ **Love**

- a visible demonstration of caring – Acts 6
- requires openess and honesty – 'walking in the light'
- does not tolerate evil (Rev. 2:20)
- There is a warning in the Ephesian church that lost its first love (Rev. 2:4) – allowed its wall to fall down!

- **Teaching and preaching the Word of God**
  - the whole issue of discipleship
  - the application of God's truth to all situations
- **Worship** (Gates of Praise)
  - the gates are often attacked first
  - the discipline of maintaining praise
- **Intercession**

5. The Key : An Unhindered Focus

Notice the unhindered focus of Nehemiah as he started the work

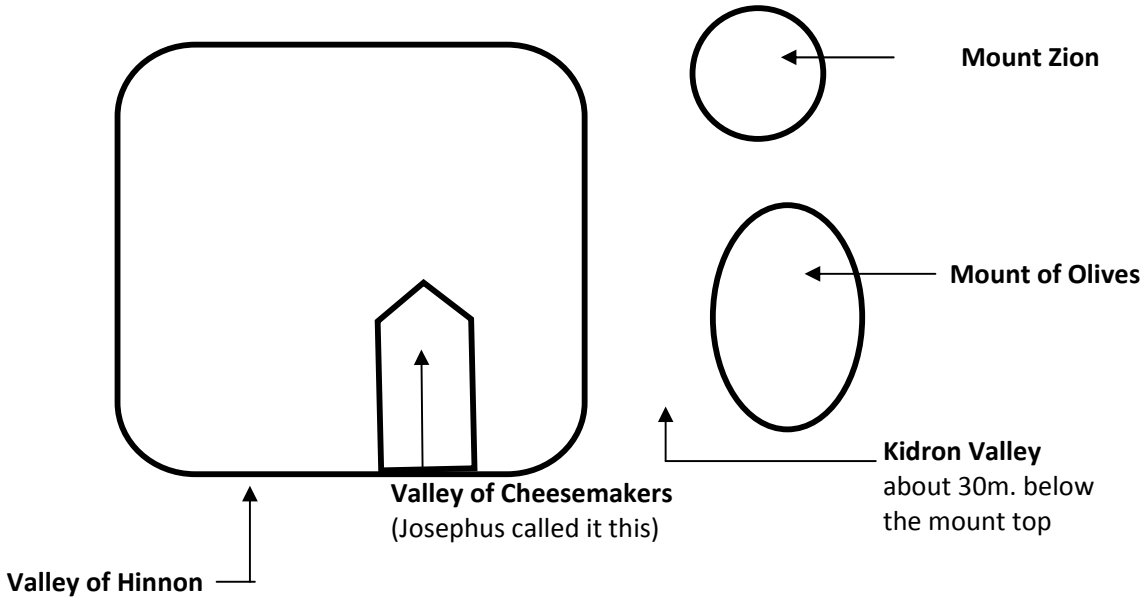
- While alone (v. 12) ***"God was putting into my mind …."***
- In his secular job (v. 18) ***"The hand of My God has been favourable to me."***
- Before his enemies (v. 20) ***"The God of Heaven will give us success."***

PRINCIPLE TWELVE
The person who finishes is the person who keeps his/her focus!

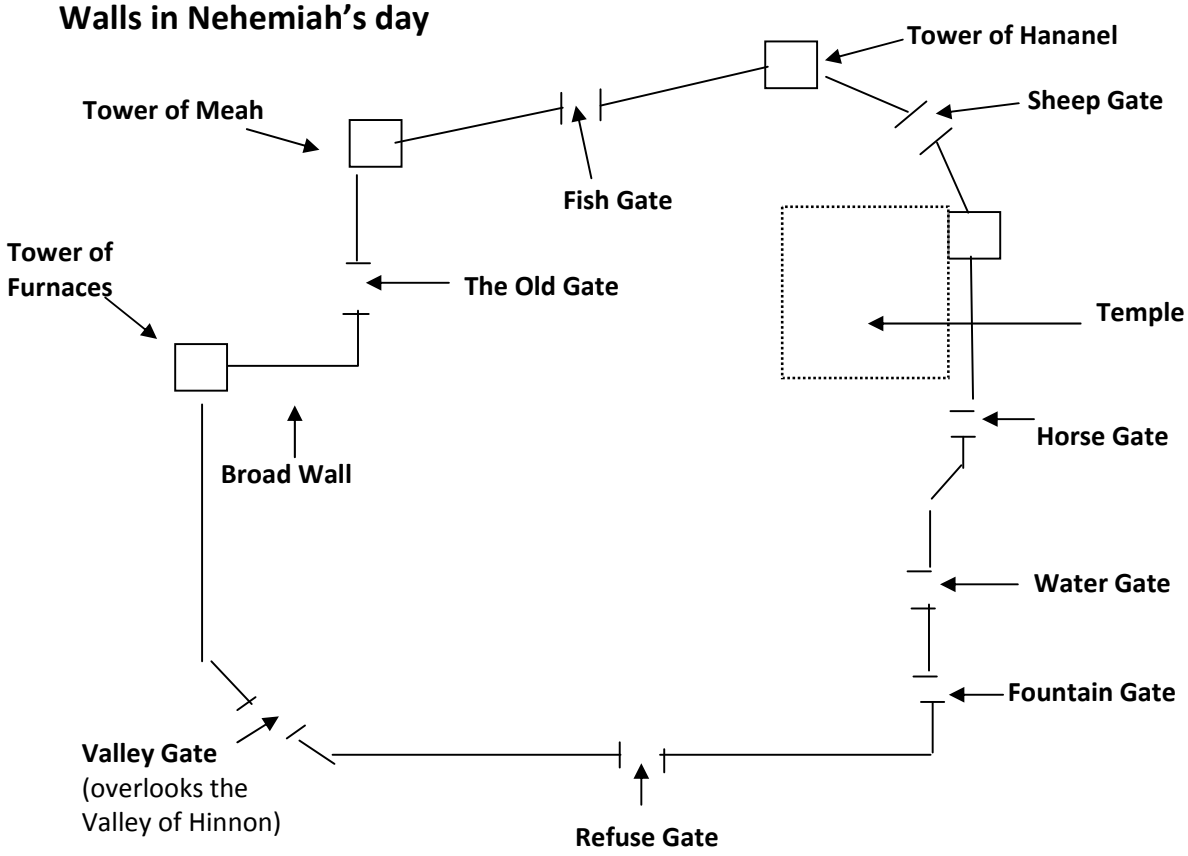
Nehemiah's focus was on God

- Focus your eyes on others and you will soon be disillusioned.
- Focus your eyes on yourself and you will be absorbed by self-pity.

The Geography of Jerusalem



Walls in Nehemiah's day



A Brief History of Jerusalem's Walls

~ 1900 BC	In Abraham's day – called Salem – a fortress on the spur between the valleys of Cheesemakers and Kidron.
~ 1450 BC	Ruled by Adoni-zedek – defeated and killed by Joshua but the city was not taken.
~ 1000 BC	* David captured Jerusalem via an unexpected entry – 2 Sam. 5:6-8 – now called Zion – the city of David. * Solomon constucted the temple, the palace and enlarged the walls greatly. * After that the walls were not looked after: ▪ Under Rehoboam (1 Kings 24:25ff) Egyptian troops broke down the walls and plundered the temple. ▪ Under Jehoram's reign Arabs and Philistines broke through the wall and plundered. ▪ Under Amaziah's reign Jerusalem was looted and the walls broken down. * Only two great kings undertook major repairs to the wall: ▪ Uzziah – the Northern Kingdom and the Syrians attacked in Ahaz' reign and Jerusalem's walls withstood the attack. ▪ Hezekiah also carried out major repairs and extensions so that the walls withstood the Assyrians.
587 BC	The walls and the city were destroyed by the Babylonians.
~ 450 BC	The walls were restored by Nehemiah.
168 BC	Antiochus IV (i.e. Greeks) destroyed the walls.
~ 165 BC	Judas Maccabeus rebuilt the walls.
~ 10 BC	These walls were repaired and extended by Herod the Great.
AD 70	The walls were destroyed by the Romans under Titus. Only one tower remained standing – the so-called 'tower of David' – actually Herodian. The city was rebuilt without walls – mainly as a Christian town. Jews were excluded in AD 132.
450	The walls were built by the Byzantines.
614	The city was sacked by the Persians.
637	The city was captured by the Arabs. The Dome of the Rock was built in 691. The walls were built again but not in the same place as Herod's walls.
1099	There was a blood-bath. The city was taken by the Crusaders.
1187	The city was re-taken by Saladin.
1517	The city was captured by the Ottoman Turks who built the present walls in 1542.
1917	Jerusalem was captured by the British.
1947	Jerusalem became a divided city – divided between Jordan and Israel.
1967	Jerusalem was again united in the 6-day war.
Present	The status of Jerusalem is still a highly contentious issue.

HOMEWORK

1. Pick two people from the list below and suggest how solitude prepared them for doing "a great work".

   Noah – Abraham – Moses – Joseph – Elijah – David – Jonah – John the Baptist – Paul

2. What has motivated you in your spiritual life? Has this always been healthy? If not, ask the Lord for new directions and motivation.

3. There are 12 gates in the New Jerusalem. (Rev.21:21) Only 8 gates are mentioned here. Work out the symbolism of the gates.

- **Sheep Gate** (3:1) – a symbol of sacrifice? Lambs were driven through here on the way to the temple – notice they sanctified it. See Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22; 1 Peter 1:18,19.

- **Fish Gate** (3:3) **–** possible symbols are:
  * sufficiency – food for survival
  * service – we are saved to serve

- **Old Gate** (3:6) **–** probably dated from David's era – a symbol of security? – the value of tradition – 'It's old but it still works'?

- **Valley Gate** (3:13) – symbolic of submission. 2 Chron. 20:26 calls this valley (Hinnon) the valley of blessing.

- **Refuse Gate** (3:14) – represents the reproach of Christ? Paul went through this gate (1 Cor. 4:13). What about us – Heb. 13:12-13?

- **Fountain Gate** (3:15) symbolic of satisfaction? See John 7:37-38.

- **Water Gate** (3:26) symbolic of sanctification? See John 3:5; 13:1-16; Eph. 5:26.

- **Horse Gate** (3:28) symbolic of service? Horses were used for warfare not for bearing burdens. See Rev. 12:11.

- **East Gate** (3:29) This led directly into the temple. Ezekiel 44:2 indicates that this gate has been closed up until the coming of a prince. God's glory will pass through this gate – Ezekiel 43:1-2.

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Three

How to handle hindrances (4:1-10)

1. **The person God uses to "do a great work"**

2. **The tactics of the enemy**
   a) **The external enemy**
      (i) Opposition by ridicule (v. 2-3)
      (ii) Opposition by threats from powerful men – intrigue (v. 7-9)
      (iii) Threats and scorn are a cloak for anger (v. 1, 7)

   b) **Overcoming external opposition**
      (i) A mind to work (v. 6)
      (ii) A heart to pray
      (iii) An eye to watch

   c) **The internal enemy – infection (v. 10)**
      (i) When others give up
      (ii) When progress is slow

3. **Progress by building and battling (4:11-23)**
   a) The danger of the half-way stage
   b) Precautions to be taken – the balance between building and battling
   c) A rallying point – communication (v. 21-23)
   d) Protection for those outside the walls (v. 22)

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Three : How to handle hindrances (4:1-10)

1. Review of the Person God uses to "do a great work"

- **A person of vision**
  - with eyes and heart on the purposes of God
  - with a deep appreciation of the covenant of God with His people
  - with a deep sense of what God wants done – in Nehemiah's case the walls needed rebuilding
  - with a vision birthed and rooted in prayer and saturated in the Word of God
- **A person of courage**
  - Nehemiah certainly knew fear – he knew the king's power
  - He still asked boldly
  - Courage often triggers the supernatural power of God
- **A person of selfless concern**
- **A person of prayer** – Nehemiah was a man of prayer: 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4,5,9; 5:19; 6:9,14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31

Compare and contrast Nehemiah with Joshua

Joshua : a destroyer of walls

Nehemiah : a builder of walls

In Joshua the People of God are **on the offensive** – moving on – there was much ground to be taken .
To enter fully into our inheritance as the People of God we have to take ground!

In Nehemiah the people of God are **on the defensive** – walls are primarily for defense – not entirely otherwise why would the New Jerusalem have walls? Rev.21:10-21 indicates these walls as over 60m high – symbolic of security. Walls are also boundaries that identify a community.

- This book speaks of **collective** defense against attack – how to build and what to build.
- Remember Romans 15:4 *"Whatever was written earlier was written for our instruction …. so we would have hope."*
- As soon as the construction crews started building, did the wall go up and everyone live happily ever after?
- No!! As soon as they started, opposition broke out. Things got worse and the project was constantly bombarded. We must expect to be opposed. We should anticipate resistance.

Today: How to handle hindrances to "doing a great work"
Tomorrow: How to solve problems

2. The Tactics of the Enemy

a) The External Enemy

The enemy tactics are both external attack and internal undermining of the will – both these are exposed.

(i) <u>Opposition by ridicule, derision and scorn – insults</u> (v. 2-3)

- "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me!" – absolutely **not true!**
- ridicule is a very powerful weapon!
- It was also a challenge to God (v. 5)
- Often this tactic succeeds in discouraging the worker more than many other more direct tactics.

- We are told such things as:

  "You are useless and the task is impossible."

  "If you do do anything it will soon collapse!"

  "Look at the enormous problems in the world – food – education – unjust distribution of wealth – the waste of material resources and what do you **do** about it? Have silly little prayer meetings!"

  "Preaching the Cross is very stupid – use your intelligence – use the media – gain power – manipulate people – gain money and prestige – **then** you will be able to make an impact!"
- Scorn hurts deeply. This kind of propaganda wounds.
- Jesus was scorned and He was perfect!
  - ***"The men that held Jesus mocked Him."*** (Lk. 22:63)
  - ***"He saved others, let Him save Himself!"*** (Lk. 23:35)
- We will know scorn, shame, sarcasm and withering, biting words.
- The world mocks our Gospel – it judges things by outward appearance – by size.
- Scorn leads to shame and shame leads to discouragement.

(ii) <u>Opposition by threats from powerful men – intrigue</u> (v. 7-9)

The People of God were surrounded by powerful enemies:

Samaria to the north

Ammon to the east

Geshem and his people to the south

Ashod to the west

These peoples were related to the Jews (see Genesis), but were bitterly opposed to their relationship with God. They broadly symbolize all unregenerate religious people of the world. This would especially be a profile of many muslims. We have so much in common with muslims. Often **religious** opposition is the greatest source of opposition to the Gospel.

- Since they were all part of the Persian Empire and Nehemiah had the authority of the king, what they probably had in mind was a policy of inflitration and terrorist activity – still it was dangerous activity on the part of these powerful enemies.
- Anger does that! It clouds one's perception of reality.
- They started with threats of physical abuse.
- Attacks on our homes and families can be very devastating as this leads to great **fear**.
- Fear is a terribly debilitating thing. It drives all else from your mind. It makes you irrational.
- Threats like these were made to the Lord Jesus to try and stop Him from doing His "great work" of salvation. (Jn. 19:1-3)

(iii) <u>Threats and scorn are a cloak for anger</u> (v. 1, 7)

- The enemy had no reason to prevent the people from building a wall.
- A wall is a defense.
- People jeer because they have no sound argument.
- The world gets angry at the message of repentance.
- Why do lions roar? It is to panic their prey!
- Satan is like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour.
- Satan hates us with a bitter hatred.
- Read 1 Peter 5:8-11 and 1 Peter 4:12-16

b) Overcoming external opposition

What did Nehemiah do? He did three key things. Often the last thing we do is pray! Our first thought is usually to retaliate, to hit back and to shout insults back. If we do this we have lost! Our weapons are spiritual weapons! (2 Cor. 10:4)

What should we do?

(i) Have a mind to work – keep on – don't stop doing the work (v. 6)

- We must simply and quietly concentrate on the task in hand – the task God has called us to do.
- The Lord Jesus was a wonderful example of this:
  - ***"When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, he did not threaten, but trusted Him who judges justly."*** (1 Pet. 2:23)
  - ***"He was oppressed and He was afflicted yet he opened not His mouth."*** (Is. 53:7)
  - He pressed on through all the mocking and scorn and physical abuse until he could shout
  - out that magnificent statement, ***"It is finished!"***
- So the answer to scorn and sarcasm is not to retaliate in kind, but to keep on keeping on.
- Don't allow yourself to be side-tracked.
  - ***"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus."*** (Phil. 2:5)
  - ***"My meat is to do the will of My Father."*** (Jn. 4:34)
  - ***"He set His face like a flint to go to Jerusalem."*** (Lk. 9:51)
  - See also Luke 22:27 and Mark 10:45
- Jesus persevered until He could say, ***"I have finished the work you have given me to do."***
- Tenacity in the work of God is vital. Do not grow weary for, ***"You will reap if you do not faint"***.

(ii) Have a heart to pray

- Prayer is an answer to the scorn. (v. 4)
- Prayer is an answer to the threats. (v. 9)
- There is no bitterness either in his heart or in his prayer. (v. 4-5)
- The early church in Jerusalem found themselves in a similar situation in Acts 4 with threats of persecution. What did they do? They prayed.
- United prayer and united praise is very powerful.
- It is interesting that all the glimpses of heaven in Scripture give us a picture of worship and praise.
- If heaven considers unceasing praise to be so important, it must be supremely valuable to God for us to praise Him in the midst of scorn and threats of violence.
- Praise de-centralises self from our lives and from the situation.
- We have an example of this in the church in Adana.
- They prayed that the reproach would be turned on their enemies:
  "Cause the same things to happen to them that they hope will befall us. Don't cover their sins."
- Nehemiah could pray like this because he knew that God had said that He would doom these specific enemies. (Ezekiel 25:2-7) It was a prayer based on God's promises.

(iii) Have an eye to watch

- They were **practical**. Nehemiah set up guards and sentries.
- We are told in Phil. 4:7 that the peace of God guards our hearts and minds.
- Reliance on God is not incompatible with taking sensible precautions.

- Analyse the attacks as they come. What tactics is the enemy using to discourage you and make you afraid so you will give up?
- Put a special watch in those areas.
- Satan has a great victory if he can laugh us out of a work of God!

c) The Internal Enemy – Infection (v. 10)

Two internal enemies are mentioned:

(i) When others give up – especially co-workers

(ii) When progress is slow – clearing away the rubbish

Both of these produce discouragement.

(i) <u>When others give up</u> (v. 10)

The people in Judah gave up. (Gen. 49:10) Judah was meant to take the lead – be the strongest of the strong, but they were giving up!

- **Retreat** was not in Nehemiah's vocabulary!
- Few things are more discouraging than friends/co-workers giving up and going home.
- Few things are more discouraging than prayer partners who stop praying.
- Few things are more discouraging than those closest to us losing their vision.

What are the reasons that cause people to give up? Why was this weakness in Judah? Chapter 6:17-18 indicates that there was **communication with the enemy**.

Why is there a loss of vision/a loss of confidence among us?

- **Loss of strength**
  * a failure to pace oneself
  * a failure to be balanced
  * the 'Elijah Syndrome'
- **Loss of vision**
  * one or two disappointments are OK, but often they come in wave after wave.
  * disappointments may be about:
    people you are trying to reach – people on your team – yourself – the situation
- **Loss of confidence**
  * There is a sense of **betrayal** – you are let down by those you trusted – your leaders – your organisation.
  * Above all else **don't communicate with the enemy**! Don't listen to him!

(ii) <u>When progress is slow</u>!

Progress was slow at the beginning because they were clearing away the rubbish to get to the foundations.

- Archeology witnesses the thoroughness of the destruction of the walls under Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. He made a good job of it!
- Before building they needed to excavate to the original foundation or to solid rock.
- Clearly this was:
  * very important
  * very tiresome and unspectacular
  * very discouraging in terms of progress
  * They were exposed to even more danger

- The lesson is clear: before you build you must get rid of the rubbish and get down to a proper foundation.
- In the history of the church there has been much 'rubbish' in the church!
- God has raised up some great 'rubbish clearers':
  Luther – **Wesley** – **Moody** etc.
- Before we can build **we must make the foundations bare**.
- The only foundation is Jesus Christ.
- This is our major obstacle in the Muslim World!
- What about the rubbish we 'christians' have left behind from:
  * the 5th / 6th / 7th century churches
  * the crusades
  * the religious wars in Europe
  * the colonial period
  * post-christian western culture
  * the current 'rubbish' in the church (some people like 'rubbish'. "It's a nice bit of tradition!")
- Then there is the rubbish in our lives!
  "Don't you know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you?" (1 Cor. 6:19)
- Is there rubbish in your mind? In your body? In your emotions?
- Is there the rubbish of pride? Unbelief? Anger? Despondence? Self-importance?
- Is there the rubblish of a dry and barren life?
- Is there a 'foul smelling heap' in your life or in the church? Progress will be slow till it is cleared away! The place for rubbish is the tip!
- Our 'tip' is the Cross – outside the wall. (1 Jn. 1:8-9)
- There are 3 ways of unloading rubbish at the tip:
  * make sure you've got right down to the foundation – to Jesus – superficial clearance isn't good enough.
  * remember that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit and He will build to perfection. (Eph. 5:25-27)
  * we too are to build (2 Pet. 1:5-8)
- The key to escaping fatigue is Is. 40:28-31

3. Progress by building and battling (4:11-23)

Now we have a different situation! The rubbish has been cleared. The foundations have been built and the walls are half way up!

a) The danger of the half-way stage!

Psychologically this is a very difficult period because:

* the initial enthusiasm is gone

* the honeymoon period is over

* you are conscious of all that needs to be done

* your strength is fading (cf. mountain climbing)

- There is a danger of 'middle age' in people and in works of God.
- This is a classic period for attacks by the enemy.

PRINCIPLE THIRTEEN
When the 'walls' of a Christian work are half way up, <u>then</u> expect Satan to unleash a fierce attack.

Note:

(i) <u>The enemy launches a fresh campaign of ruthless talk/threats</u> (v. 11)

At first there was laughter and scorn. Now there are threats of force. Note some characteristics:

- It was a **concerted attack**. Sanballat, Tobiah and the others got together to attack.
- It was a **cruel attack** – ***"We will kill you!"*** (v. 11)
- It was a **confident attack**. They assumed the work would stop.

(ii) <u>The threats resulted in fear</u> (v. 12)

- Those who were building the wall, but who lived outside Jerusalem in the surrounding villages were especially fearful. They asked ten times if they could go home and defend their homes and villages.
- Alarmists and pessimists spread fear. (v. 14)
- Those who lived closest to the enemy were the most afraid.
- Everyone was affected (v. 14)
- Because of this fear Nehemiah stood alone!
  It also happened to Paul. ***"All men forsook me."*** (2 Tim. 4:16,17)
- We will often be tempted to be afraid.
- When we are afraid we usually cannot disguise it and we easily talk about it. Perhaps this helps us feel less guilty for not being courageous.
- But talk of fear spreads discouragement. Everyone around you is affected by your spiritual temperature!

PRINCIPLE FOURTEEN
When you are under attack, watch your tongue! Never give a discouraging report.

(iii) <u>The reason for the attacks</u> – to cause discouragement (v. 7)

- Sanballat and the others were very angry because of a loss of control.
- The principalities and powers are very angry with us because we are going to weaken their control over people's lives.
- They will manipulate the authorities.
- The major reason for the fury of the enemy is that you are a demonstration of the power of God!
- Wherever the enemy sees a work of the Spirit he attacks it.
- This was true in the life of the Lord Jesus. His life kindled flames of hatred and jealousy.
- It was also true of Stephen.
- Satan is not an opponent of dead orthodoxy, but of the living power of the Holy Spirit.
- All through the coming weeks and throughout your life, Satan will do all he can to prove to us that his power is greater than the power of the Lord Jesus Himself.
- This is the reason for the attacks on us as the wall goes up.

(iv) <u>The reaction to the attacks</u> – the cure for discouragement

What did Nehemiah do?

He remembered

In all the pressure and stress, with everyone conscious of fear and the danger of the work stopping; with the people grumbling and going home; conscious of the ruthlessness of the enemy, what does Nehemiah do?

- He remembers ***"the Lord who is great and awesome."*** (v. 14)
- He maintains perspective.
- The magnification of fleas is very terrifying but it comes from a loss of perspective.
- Fear robs us of our perspective so that we look everywhere except to God for help.
- There is a sad problem of forgetfulness among us.
- See the story of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:12) also Ps. 27:1-3 and Ex. 14:13.

PRINCIPLE FIFTEEN
The people were united around the same goal by having their attention directed to God. Remember who He is! Remember His promises! Remember what He has done for us.

b) Precautions to be taken – the balance between building and battling

How should we react to an attack of discouragement? We must remember. We must not allow forgetfulness to creep in.

Prayer without precautions is presumption

- We need inspiration and organisation
- We must remember **and** fight
- We must remember:
  - who God is
  - that we are called and chosen
  - that we are doing His work
- Remember **and** fight – everything is at stake!

How did they resist? They kept a balance between building and battling (v. 19-20)

- Half were to work on the building.
- The other half were on watch with spears, shields, bows and coats of mail.
- They changed over periodically to relieve fatigue.

PRINCIPLE SIXTEEN
Battling must never replace building. The wall must go up. At the same time we do still need to battle.

The best defense of truth is to spread the Gospel and build up the Spirit-filled life. There are many examples of this:
John Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress in prison.
John Wesley was put in prison 5 times and still the revival spread.

c) A rallying point – communication (v. 21-23)

- Nehemiah was the rallying point of the whole group that was **watching**.
- There was a trumpeter by his side.

- He toured the walls encouraging the workers.
- Nehemiah was the focal point.
- At the sound of the trumpet they could concentrate their forces and so win victory.
- Look all over the Muslim World. The workers are thinly spread. The work is immense!
- We have a rallying point – the Lord Jesus!
- A watcher:
  - knows the situation
  - prays
  - praises
  - fasts
  - is ready for sacrifice

One day the trumpet will sound and the enemy will be finally thrown down!!

d) Protection for those outside the walls (v. 22)

- A plan was put into effect for all those from the outlying villages to stay in the city instead of returning to their homes outside the city.
- This increased the protective guard in case of a night attack.
- It was a constant watch. No one took off their clothes to sleep at night.
- See Eph. 6:10-20
- None of us should remove our clothing at night!

Nehemiah's constant attitude of service shines out throughout this chapter.

HOMEWORK

1. **How are you dealing with criticism?**

   - Do you calmly consider the source of the criticism and ask yourself whether it is valid?
   - Is the person trying to tear you down or to give you positive criticism?
   - Should you be listening to it?
   - Is the criticism partly true even if it is from a negative source?
   - Are you guilty or innocent?
   - Do you compare it with Scripture?
   - Are there any Scriptures about that particular area of your life that is under criticism?
   - What advice does Scripture have? Is it the same or different?
   - Learn to examine criticism and learn what you can from it.

2. **Are you tempted to give up? If so, what are the reasons for this?**

3. **What is the rubbish that needs clearing out from your situation?**

4. **When your people/team are getting discouraged, how would you:**
   - Unify them around the same goal?
   - Direct their attention to the Lord?
   - Maintain the balance?
   - Provide a rallying point?
   - Serve others?

Principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Four

Operation Intimidation: problem solving in the work of God

1. **Dealing with internal problems – social and economic**

   a) The Situation (5:1-5)

   - **The complaints of the people**
   - **The cause of the problems**

   b) Nehemiah's reaction to the problems (5:6-7)

   - **He was very angry**
   - **He controlled himself**

   c) Nehemiah's solutions to the problem (5:7-13)

   - **Confrontation**
   - **His corrections**

   d) The People's Response (5:13)

   e) The reality of "doing a work for God"

   f) Conditions needed before you rebuke the team

   Three principles:

   - **A life that is above reproach**
   - **A motive to inspire**
   - **The power to overcome**

2. **Dealing with External Problems** (6:1-19)

   a) When did the attack occur? (6:1)

   b) What were these attacks? (6:12-14, 16-19)

   - **The snare of the world's friendship** (2-4)
   - **The subtlety of the world's slander** (5-9)
   - **The scandal of the world's religion** (10-14)
   - **Spies everywhere** (6:16-19)

3. **Happiness is a Walk on the Wall**

   The dedication of the people and the wall (12:27-47)

Summary

The wall is finished!! Why? God's plan and God's power!

The Key? To be available to be used!

Principles of "Doing a Great Work" for God in the Muslim World from Nehemiah

Study Four

Operation Intimidation : Problem Solving in the Work of God

This is our last session looking at the principles of "doing a great work" for God in the Muslim World. Nehemiah's problems were not only from external enemies and they were not only from discouragement and fear among his own people. In fact the problems that plagued him the most were **internal** problems.

It is the internal issues in the church and in mission teams that are more difficult to deal with than external attacks. The major reason that workers leave the Field is not persecution or hardship, but because they can't get on with their fellow workers.

In Nehemiah 5:1-19 various problems are mentioned. It is these same things that plague so many "great works" for God in the Muslim World.

1. Dealing with social and economic problems – love, loans and money problems – internal problems

a) The Situation (5:1-5)

- Food shortages possibly caused by attacks on their supply lines (v. 2-3)
- Heavy taxation
- Loans at a high rate of interest
- Mortgages on oppressive terms
- Children being sold into slavery to pay debts with no possibility of reclamation
- At the heart of the problems was selfishness
- It was a financial fiasco
- The result was misunderstanding, trouble, friction, doubt and suspicion among the people doing the work
- Few issues are more complicated in Christian work than those that revolve around the misuse of money
- For many people God controls every area of their life except their wallet!
- Financial pressure has often been a cause of spiritual defeat
- The result of all this was that the building of the wall stopped
- There was a great outcry – especially from the wives

What are the principles for dealing with social and economic issues in doing "a great work" for God?
How are we to solve these problems?

(i) <u>The complaints of the people</u> (on the team) (v. 1-5)

There were three classes of people who were very upset:

- The large landless families with insufficient income to feed themselves (v. 2)
- Families with property who were being forced to mortgage it to buy food to eat (v. 3)
- Those who were forced to borrow money at exorbitant interest rates to pay the royal tax levied against their fields and vineyards by their Persian overlords (v. 4-5)

(ii) <u>The cause of the problems</u>

The result of this was:

- The loss of land and the selling of their sons and daughters into slavery! (v. 5)
- The Old Testament law said that indentured workers had to be released after 6 years and at the year of jubilee. (See Ex. 21:2-11; Lev. 25:10-17; Deut. 15: 7-18)

- The law was not being kept and this was leading to acute suffering and famine (v. 3)
- This famine was increased by two factors:
  - an increase in the population of Jerusalem
  - the people were working on the wall and watching and were not in the fields

So there were three problems:

- Famine
- Heavy taxes to the Persians
- Usury by the money lenders

b) Nehemiah's Reaction to the Problems (v. 6-7)

This is a model for us at Christian workers. He is honest about what he feels!

(i) <u>He was very angry</u> (v. 6)

- The Hebrew word means 'to burn within' – seething anger!
- Why was he so angry? He knew the law and he knew God's view on all this. (Ex. 22:25; Deut. 29:19-20)
- Lending money to fellow believers and charging interest was wrong!
- Slavery and bondage was forbidden among believers.

The source of the problems was that God's people ignored and disobeyed God's law – Why?
The answer is greed!

(ii) <u>He controlled himself</u> (v. 7)

Outbursts of anger are futile. He needed **a plan** to bring about change. He consulted with himself weighing the issues involved.

c) Nehemiah's solutions to the problem (v. 7-13)

(i) <u>Confrontation</u> – **bringing the situation out into the light**

It was a clear confrontation in front of all the people. They responded in silence. They had no defense.
He accused the people – his fellow workers – of three things:

- You are charging interest. It is forbidden. (v.7)
- You are selling your people into permanent slavery. It is forbidden. (v. 8)
- You are losing your distinctives as the people of God. (v. 9)

(ii) <u>His corrections</u>

Christian workers don't simply accuse their colleagues of sin and then walk away! They propose changes. They help think through a better way. So his advice was:

- Determine to stop doing wrong (v. 10)
- Make specific plans to correct the wrong immediately regardless of the sacrifice involved (v. 11)
- ***"…..give back <u>this very day</u>…."***
- Declare your plans for correction as a promise to God. (v. 12)
- Realise the seriousness of a promise to God. (v. 13)

d) The People's Response (v. 13)

They changed! They all praised the Lord and **did** what they had promised. The great work on the wall continued!
It doesn't always work so smoothly, but these are the principles God has given us. In faith let us do it God's way!

e) The reality of doing a "work for God": internal problems are often the worst kind

The same lessons are much needed on our teams today.

1. God is pleased with the **wise** handling of money and all the issues that relate to it. (Mt. 25:14-18 – the parable of the talents and Rom. 13:8 ***"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law."***)
2. Prolonged personal sin by a team member takes a heavy toll on the whole team and it slows down the work of God.
3. Correcting sin and wrong doing in our lives begins with facing it head-on. A team where there is no confrontation of sin (just an atmosphere of politeness) will never accomplish much.
4. Correction is carried out most effectively when a promise is made to God.

f) Conditions needed before you rebuke the team (v. 15)

You can only challenge and correct others when your own life is beyond suspicion!

"I did not do so … because of the fear of God" (v. 15) (see also Ps. 34:9; Deut. 10:12,13,17,18,20)

- It often saves a lot of bother if, when in Rome, you do as the Romans.
- For a Christian worker this sort of "cultural adaptation" is fatal!
- It robs the Christian worker of his/her integrity and, without integrity, we have nothing to say to the world or to our team.

There are 3 principles here:

➢ **We need to maintain a life that is above reproach.**

- The only way you can begin to confront others on the team is to be above reproach.
- Nehemiah refrained from certain things such as greed, hunger for power and prestige, bribery and corruption, because he had a compelling motive.
- You can't confront others if you are conscious of corruption in your own heart.
- As Governor of Judah, Nehemiah succeeded others who had certainly asserted the perogatives of their position. (v. 14,15) But Nehemiah deliberately relinquished these prerogatives – rejected the normal practices of abuse of power – so he could maintain a Godly testimony above every taint of self-interest.
- So Christian workers need a sensitive conscience. No-one should be in the place of confrontation unless he can look the person in the face and say truly, "I did not do so….."
    - **refuse to comply with the customary standards of the world**
      (see Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:7-8 – an uncompromising and fearless prophet)
    - **refuse to exercise power and privilege**
      (see Abraham in Genesis 14:21)

  What are **our** privileges – economic security? education? etc? Often this means holding these **'things'** lightly – welcoming the loosening of attachment to 'things'.
    - **refuse to compromise any questionable standard of righteousness**
      "Others can – you can't." In little things exercise self-restraint – self-denial
- So you will maintain a life that is above reproach.
- Thank God for the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin.
- Thank God for the **grace** and the power of the Holy Spirit enabling us to live without "sin ruling over us" (Rom. 6).

➢ **We need a motive to inspire** (v. 5)

"Because of the fear of God" or in NT terms ***"Because the love of Christ compels us."*** (2. Cor.5:14)

Our motives are of great importance! The motive for holy living is our love for Jesus and His love empowering us. My goal is not my honour, but His Glory. This is fundamentally opposed to all self-indulgence and self-interest. We can say:

" Because of all that Jesus has done for me, I will not do this thing. Because He loves me so much and has promised to look after me, I won't be corrupted by "filthy lucre"!

- **We need the power to overcome**

- It cost Nehemiah to say what he said!
- It is in the application of the Cross in our lives that there is the power to turn out sin and implant holiness in our lives.
- We go to the Cross to be forgiven. We must learn to **stay** there until the Holy Spirit has crucified our lust, our affections and our desires.
- The life that is sacrificed on the Cross – the crucified life – is the life that will experience resurrection power to live in purity and holiness.
- The secret of winning is **not only** learning to say **"no"** to sin, but also to say **"yes"** to God's will and God's purposes.
- So it is from a place of living 'a crucified life' and a 'resurrection life' that we can be above suspicion and command the respect needed to be able to confront others.

Review of the principles of internal problem solving

- Notice the problem. Grasp the situation. (v. 1-5)
- React to the problem – not with an explosive reaction but by careful evaluation.
- Resolve the problem by:
  - fearless confrontation on the basis of indisputible evidence
  - showing the implications of the things that have been done
  - giving a positive example of how things should have been done
  - an appeal for restoration
  - securing the co-operation that is needed for the solution

2. Dealing with external problems (6:1-19)

Here we see a last attempt to stop the wall being built.

a) When did the attack occur? (v. 1)

- The wall was nearly finished. They only needed to hang the gates.
- The enemy was crowding in for one last effort to stop the completion of a "great work for God".
- In many ways we are living in the last days of world mission.
- The **good news** is that God said through Joel, *"In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on **all people**"*. So we must expect amazing church growth!
- The **bad news** is that Satan is increasingly angry because he knows his time is short, so he is exerting every possible effort to stop the purposes of God and slow down the coming of the end.
- We need to expect and be prepared for last minute attacks.
- They will be very sneaky and insidious.
- Just before you think you have won – watch out!!
- This is typical of Satan's approach.

b) What were these attacks? (6:12-14, 16-19)

Four are mentioned:

The snare of the world's friendship (2-4)

The subtilty of the world's slander (5-9)

The scandal of the world's religion (10-14)

Spies everywhere (16-19)

All these were meant to intimidate!

➢ <u>The snare of the world's friendship</u> (2-4)

It was a polite personal request – a persistent appeal given five times.

- Before the enemy has been cruel – look how nice they are now!
- Ono was about 20 miles NW of Jerusalem in a nice valley with lots of trees – very pleasant
- "Nehemiah you have been having a hard time, get away for a while, relax, you need a break from the stress of it all ….. etc. It is bad for your health. Take it easy"
- But in their hearts they had kidnap and murder!
- Beware of the snare of the world's friendship!
- Beware of Satan as he appears once as a "roaring lion" and later as an "angel of light"!

Nehemiah's Response – "Oh No! to Ono!!"

"Really Nehemiah, please come down to our level. We know you are the Govenor and are really important, but we leaders need to confer. Let's have a summit etc."

- **Satan's chief concern is to make you compromise!**
- If you say, "Well, why not? I do need to relax and there is no harm in that." You should expect a knife in your back!
- ***"No soldier on active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life …."*** (2 Tim. 2:4)
- A compromising Christian worker is in the way (a brake rather than a blessing) in the work of God.
- So Nehemiah said, ***"I am doing a great work … so I cannot come down!"*** (v. 3)
- The crowd jeered at Jesus on the Cross and said, "Come down!"
- If Jesus had "come down", that would have been the end of our salvation.
- We are **"seated with Christ in heavenly places".** (Eph. 2:6) Don't ever yield to the temptation to "come down".
- Jesus said, "No". Always say 'No' to Ono!
- Never ever agree to a cease-fire with Satan! He is the father of lies and he will destroy you.

➢ <u>The subtilty of the world's slander</u> (5-9)

- This is intimidation by blackmail!
- This is a common pressure tactic against us.
- The strategy is to broadcast innuendo – an open public letter (equivalent to a newspaper article today) reporting **a rumour** – "it is said" – of course the enemy started the rumour!
- The rumour was that Nehemiah planned to rebel against King Artaxerxes (who had shown him so much favour) and declare himself king in Jerusalem. It was a very improbable rumour.
- The rumour even said that Nehemiah was clever enough to use religion to manipulate the people.
- The Persian Empire was large and very sensitive to rebellion so this was a dangerous rumour.

- This was indeed the subtilty of the world's slander!
- They charged Nehemiah with pride and self-seeking.

Here are four observations that are true of all false slander:

- **the source of the information is usually unnamed**
- **the information is incorrect and highly explosive**
- **it is designed to hurt you personally, ruin your reputation and hopefully remove you from the scene**
- **it is always motivated by evil**

If the world can't persuade you to compromise, be sure it will spread rumours and lies about you! The purpose is to weaken your will and fill you with fear so that you stop doing the "great work".

The tongue is a willing tool in Satan's hands! Remember Satan is called "the accuser of the brethren"!

Nehemiah's Response to this Intimidation (v. 8, 9)

- Absolute and complete denial – "You are inventing these things in your own mind….you are trying to frighten me!"
- The great antidote to fear in this situation is **prayer** – ***"Oh God, strengthen the work of my hands!"***
- Refuse to bow to pressure!
- They said of Jesus that He was a glutton and a drunkard! They misrepresented Him. But when they reviled Him, He didn't revile back.
- Our answer in these situations is a denial. Our life is an open book. Allow your integrity to be examined. Don't stop the work!

➢ <u>The scandal of the world's religion</u> – a subtle conspiracy (v. 10-14)

- A man approaches Nehemiah, professing to be a prophet, and tries to persuade Nehemiah to be governed by fear and shut himself up in the temple. This was to break the law, for only priests could go into the temple. (Num. 18:7) This man uses very pious and religious language.
- In other words, the temptation was that the actions of Nehemiah should be governed by the opinions of others – especially 'religious people'.
- You must not allow yourself to be governed by what other people think if you are doing a "great work" for God – not even other 'Christians'.

Nehemiah's Response to this Intimidation

He asked himself three questions:

- **Is this plan logical and does it make sense?**
- **Is it right for me to do this?**
- **Is God behind this plan?**

- In answering these questions **a knowledge of the Word of God is essential**. God won't want you to do something that is contrary to His revealed will.
- Using these questions, the answer was very clear! God did not send this prophet! He was a false prophet sent by the enemies to frighten Nehemiah so that he would yield to their requests. (v. 12)
- Jesus also had to contend with false religious teachers. You will have to do this too.
- Jesus never quit, never compromised and never slowed down until He had cried, ***"It is finished."***

- **Spies Everywhere!** (v. 16-19)

  Advice, warnings and threats all poured into Nehemiah's ears – everything to get him to stop "the great work".

  - Tobiah was married into the family of someone in Nehemiah's own team!
  - This person sang Tobiah's praises in Nehemiah's presence! He reported back every plan and strategy to the enemy.
  - unconsciously and without malice you will find that even team members will betray you and give ammunition to the enemy. Our security always has some leaks!
  - Don't be intimidated!
  - Like Nehemiah, stay on your knees before God's throne. Never lose sight of God's call on your life!
  - Keep focussed on building the wall.
  - Finally (v. 15) the wall was finished!
  - May God grant to you that great victory cry, "it is finished!" inspite of the attacks, the harrassment, the rumours, the unfair treatment and the intimidation!
  - Notice the effect on the enemy! (v. 16) Total demoralisation!
  - God has called you to "do a great work" for Him in the Muslim World.
  - It is impossible to complete this task without meeting massive, direct and indirect opposition.
  - What is the answer? Always keep focussed. Never give in to the enemy. Keep going until you too can cry, ***"It is finished!"***

3. Happiness is a walk on the wall! (12:27-47)

These verses are about the dedication of the wall that God had helped them build (6:16).

- The chapter is filled with joy and laughter because of all that God had done for them. All that they had worked for had been accomplished.
- The Levites (284 of them – 11:3) were specialists in singing, worship, musical instruments etc.
- They led the great celebration.
- Nehemiah organised two choirs. Ezra led one and Nehemiah led the other.
- Ezra went one way around the walls and Nehemiah went round the other.
- The choirs sang as they walked on top of the walls.
- They met at the temple.
- There was great joy and celebration. The joy of the people could be heard from a distance (v. 43)
- What was the reason? **"Because God has given them great joy!"** (v. 43)
- The story had begun with ruined walls and many tears. It ends with great joy and singing and worship.

Five Great Conclusions

1. An atmosphere of happiness should surround God's people when we celebrate all that God is doing.
2. Music and singing is the best way to express and communicate joy.
3. A joyful spirit will have far reaching effects!
4. Happiness is not dependent on outward circumstances, but on the progress of our inward focus.
5. We can do a lot if we work together doing God's will in God's way with God's power. There is enormous satisfaction in seeing progress and completing a great work through vision, commitment and prayer.

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. 8:10)

Summary

So the wall is finished in 52 days! (v. 15). ***"It was accomplished by the help of our God!"*** (v. 16)
There is a real note of triumph!

There are two explanations for their success. The "great work" succeeded because:

(i) **It was God's plan**

(ii) **God's power empowered the workers**

These two points are of vital importance. To "do a great work" in the Muslim World we should make sure that **we** do not start the projects. **God must initiate projects and programmes.**

- We are called to reach our generation with the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- Leave the masterplan to God. Obey when He tells you to start.
- In order to accomplish the evangelisation of the world **God has chosen us**. He plans to use **us** in doing "a great work". He wants us to be **co-workers together with Him**.
- We need to remember that, **by ourselves** – even if we are doing God's work – we have no power, no strength and no wisdom to deal with the attacks and problems that come. We need **ability** to do the work and we have none ourselves.
- We need the Holy Spirit. His presence gives us power (the ability to work). We **can** be ***"clothed with power from on high"***. (Lk. 24:49)
- Before we can be 'clothed' with the Holy Spirit we must 'take off" our old clothes – negativity, doubt, self-sufficiency, self-glorification, ambition and the love of power, prestige and success.
- All that must go and then we can 'put on' the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom and strength to withstand **every onslaught** of Satan.
- The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom to deal with **every crisis** that we will experience 'on the team'.

The Key? To be available to be used!

HOMEWORK

- How is your tongue? Don't say "Ahhhhhhhh"! Get into a group with two or three team members (people you know well) and ask each other, "How is your tongue?"
- Give an example of when it got you into trouble.
- What is your greatest struggle in controlling your tongue? Gossip? Lies?
- What are the traits of a wise tongue?
- What areas do you need to work on?
- What does it feel like when others attack us?