

CITY WATCH

NEHEMIAH 7:1-4 | Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, ² I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. ³ And I said to them, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes." ⁴ The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt.

The walls are up. The doors are set. Congratulations and celebrations! Hold on a minute. The first half of Nehemiah focuses on rebuilding the walls of stone. The second half focuses on rebuilding the walls of faith. The physical wall is but a means to a much greater end: securing the spiritual boundaries of the true Israel of God, postexile. When that's done, they can celebrate. And so can we.

Nehemiah's walls may be compared to the institutional life of the Church. And his reforms are like the spiritual life of the Church. First the hardware. Then the software. Both are essential. Both are ever in need of upkeep and renewal.

Having completed the wall, therefore, Nehemiah begins his greater work, which becomes his greatest legacy. That is, renewing and reordering Israel's community life around pure worship and holiness to the Lord (J.I. PACKER).

He starts by appointing singers, Levites, and gatekeepers to guard the city (:1). This is odd at first sight. Why appoint a worship team as watchers? On second thought, why not? Isn't worship the reason for Jerusalem's existence? Didn't priests and Levites kickstart the construction of the wall? Didn't King Jehoshaphat put a choir on the frontline of battle,

resulting in a great victory? (2 CHRON 20:21-22). Nehemiah's choice, therefore, makes perfect sense. Appointing worshippers as watchers brings the city under spiritual surveillance, as every city should be. For the enemy never sleeps.

Next, Nehemiah puts Hanani his brother and Hananiah in charge of the city. It was Hanani who first told Nehemiah about Jerusalem's distress (:1:3). And Hananiah was a faithful man in charge of the citadel at the northwest wall, which was vulnerable to Samaritan attack. So the Holy City is now walled, watched, and in worthy hands. Her reproach is being removed. Her shalom is being restored. Well done, Nehemiah.

WALL OF DUTY

Watchfulness is a wall in dire need of repair in today's Church. True, the Lord guards the city. But he does not dismiss the watchers. The Lord who neither slumbers nor sleeps invites us all to co-watch with him (PS 127:1, PS 121:4). *Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (MATT 26:40-41).

■ Are you awake? A Church that keeps watch over the city is a priceless national asset. Will you watch and pray? Some preach. Others teach. Some organise. Others mobilise. But all can watch and worship and pray. All are summoned for national duty on the prayer wall of Singapore. Keeping our city under surveillance day and night is an essential spiritual safety measure. It is our sacred duty. Heed Jesus' warning: *What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake* (MARK 13:37). Don't be caught napping. Reject Satan's lie that you have no time. If it matters, you will make time. *Where your heart is willing, it will find a thousand ways. But where it is unwilling, it will find a thousand excuses* (CHOTU DHIMAN). Search deep within. Pray: *Make my heart a house of prayer* (CHARLES WESLEY).

■ Are you aligned? Pray: Lord, give me a willing heart that throbs with your love for Singapore. And because of love, I will not keep silent. Because my heart yearns for my city's salvation, revival, healing,

transformation, and destiny, I refuse to be quiet—*until her righteousness blazes down like the sun and her salvation flames up like a torch* (ISA 62:1 | THE MESSAGE).

■ Are you alert? Songs of praise are weapons of war. While we still can't sing aloud in church on Sundays, we can sing our lungs out at home every day! Sing strong: *I raise a hallelujah, in the presence of my enemies. I raise a hallelujah, louder than the unbelief. I raise a hallelujah, my weapon is a melody. I raise a hallelujah, heaven comes to fight for me. I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm. Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar. Up from the ashes, hope will arise. Death is defeated, the King is alive!*

■ Are you active? Count it a huge privilege to be numbered among the Lord's victorious army of worshippers and warriors. The Lord of Host is still recruiting. Will you be his ally to rally the troops? *Let us go at once to entreat the favour of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going* (ZECH 8:21). Receive a fresh anointing from our Commander-in-Chief to enlist those in your circle: Families and fraternities. Church leaders and church members. Classmates and colleagues. Silver Generation and Next Generation.

• Pray! Envision, post-pandemic, a critical mass of singing sentinels and worshipping warriors arising from all walks of life. All harmonising in clusters of prayer—at their housing blocks, in church, on campus, at the office, on the beach, in the park, along the street. With one voice, exalting one God, echoing one hope: *Your Kingdom come, Your will be done* in Singapore as it is in heaven!

• Pray! Until hearts of praise and houses of prayer spring up everywhere! Until it is said of Singapore: *How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven* (GEN 28:17). Believe. Receive.