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This inspirational talk given by Kathy Merrill, Peace Haven's Manager of Inspirational Programs, was presented to our Board of Trustees and Directors team on February 10, 2018 at their annual strategic planning meeting. This enlightening talk focused on Peace Haven's 2018 metaphysical theme based on the story of Nehemiah from the Bible.

## *We are doing a great work and cannot come down!*

by Kathy Merrill  
Manager of Inspirational Programs

The story of Nehemiah is one of those Bible stories that can apply to every Christian Scientist as we all continuously work on spiritualizing our individual consciousness—acknowledging, lifting, exalting perfect God, perfect man.

Through my individual study, I am seeing that there are three major valuable aspects to the story of Nehemiah found in chapters 1-7. The first theme exemplifies how to handle animal magnetism. The second shows us how to give a Christian Science treatment with affirmation and denial. And the third gives us a blueprint for any kind of building—either literal or spiritual and mental. As we study the story, let's keep in mind the spiritual footsteps that Nehemiah moves through to accomplish his task.

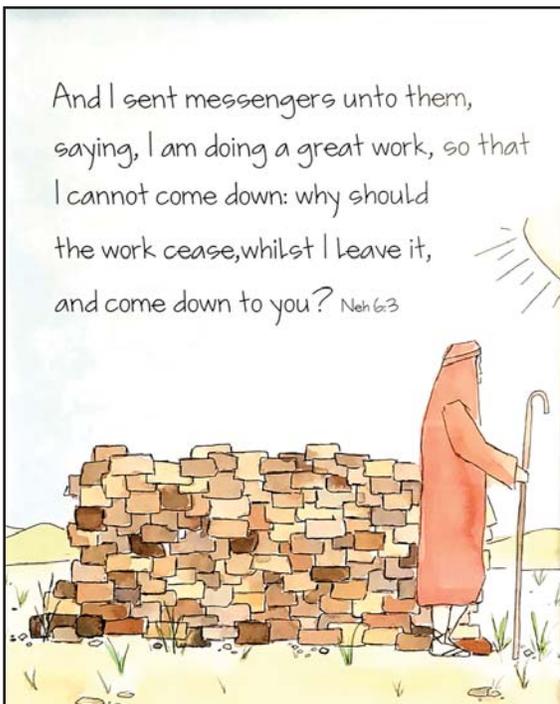
Who was Nehemiah? Exiled from Israel around 445 BCE, he was a man of great importance, living and working in the Persian court, and acting as one of the king's cupbearers, which meant he tasted the king's wine for poison—a very important, responsible job). The commentaries say he probably was wealthy and high-ranking, but sources also say that his wealth was not directed towards his own self-interest, but towards

helping his fellow countrymen. So there seems to be a sense of generosity and benevolence in his thought. His brother had traveled to Jerusalem and had come back to inform him that everything in Jerusalem had been torn down, including the majestic Temple of Solomon and the defensive walls around the city.

Nehemiah was deeply troubled and distressed when he heard this, and the Bible says he *prayed and fasted* before he went to the king to ask permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. His motive was completely unselfish. He was aware that "Jerusalem lieth waste," that it was vulnerable to attack, the gates had been burned with fire, the city was unprotected, and there was no defense.

As one Christian Science article states, "Upon beginning the study of Christian Science, we have all discovered 'how our own Jerusalem lieth waste,' how very unprofitable most of our thinking has been. Like the Jews under Nehemiah's leadership, we too feel

And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Neh 6:3



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the urge to ‘Let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach,’ and like them, we strengthen our hands ‘for this good work’ of learning what God is, and by that knowledge, destroying the lies about Him” (Roberts, 253).

Nehemiah arrived early in Jerusalem and told no one. He scouted out the problem and formulated an ingenious plan. Because of this early preparation, there was no interference from either well-meaning or malicious thoughts. No person could destroy this inspired mission. He protected the spiritual idea until it could be safely nurtured, realized, and put into action.

As we study the story of Nehemiah, we can begin to see how symbolic it is for any group of Christian Scientists who are building anything, including a growing concept in their own spiritual understanding, as church members who are building a church, a group of people building a business or company, or members of a Board at a Christian Science care facility who are building a new addition, or even a brand-new facility.

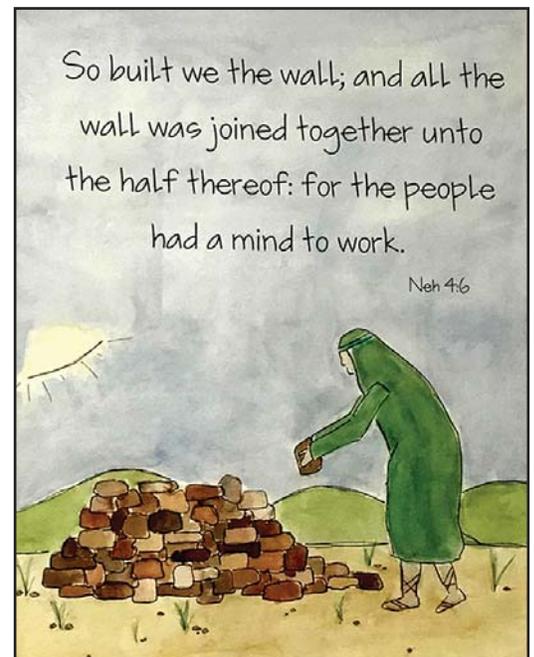
Each of us has a wall of spiritual understanding that we are constantly working on and erecting, individually and collectively, brick by brick, thought by thought. This wall is the continuing growth of a clearer realization of the allness of God and the nothingness of anything else.

The concept of building represents a forward, progressive, accomplishment of spiritual good as we strive to work on a mental structure of Truth and Love—“a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Cor. 5:1).

One of our main responsibilities as spiritual builders is to establish a mental defense around our own thought, protecting consciousness moment by moment.

"In the prophecy of Ezekiel we read, 'O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.' Every Christian Scientist is appointed a watchman, and he should see to it that no thought of inability, anxiety, or discouragement enters his own consciousness to hinder the helpfulness of his life. He is to watch that nothing but kind, loving thoughts go out from him, only such thoughts as will bring health and harmony into other lives. He is to watch for opportunities to make the whole world purer, happier, and holier. He is to watch for the good in mankind, to magnify the good and lose sight of all else. He is to stand constantly on his watch and listen for Truth's voice to direct him, and as he hears and obeys there will come to him the blessed consciousness of having been faithful over the few things entrusted to his keeping, and a happy realization of the promised dominion over many things" (Watchfulness, Frances M. Gorrell, *Christian Science Sentinel*, April 8, 1917).

Nehemiah had three particularly aggressive forms of malpractice that came at him repeatedly during this building process represented by Geshem, Tobiah, and Sanballat. Their territories physically surrounded Jerusalem, which shows the mental environment Nehemiah and Jerusalem were facing. These three men represented destructive, antagonistic qualities of the carnal mind such as hatred, suspicion, and jealousy. Nehemiah responded to these three, malicious, aggressive mental suggestions, with the affirmative declaration—“ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem” (Neh. 2:20).



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This clear-cut, laser-like statement of Truth,—declared and acknowledged—can be affirmed in any treatment that we are giving. Really, this whole story is about how to give a treatment: using strong affirmations of truth and the denial and rejection of evil in whatever form it attempts to disguise itself.

**No portion** implies that these thoughts have no present claim or entitlement, and no place to operate in thought. They are not present, because God is the only presence. They have no power, because God is the supreme power. They can't threaten, dominate, or put an obstacle in our path. Evil has no prerogative to cause worry or distress or fear. No portion might also mean that evil has no share or percentage, no jurisdiction, no ability to intimidate, or to try to govern thought.

**No right** means they have no future claim that could ever hinder spiritual progress. The only time is now, as we demonstrate the co-existence of God and man, constant uninterrupted perfection and harmony. So, there is no false prediction, no prophecy or curse, no outlining of bad things to come. The ever-presence of infinite God precludes anything negative ever coming to pass.

**No memorial** implies that it has no past claim, no history, or record. It can't leave a scar or memory of an accident, or hurt feelings, or a history of a mistake. There cannot remain even a trace of evidence, the smell of smoke so to speak, that evil ever had any connection with God's man.

Nehemiah knew what the opposition was, and what it was trying to do. He knew that the enemy was impersonal, aggressive suggestion, and not people. Gossip, slander, vicious criticism, and intentionally directed malicious malpractice could not touch the spiritual work he was given to do as long as he recognized the impersonality of evil. So he and his cohorts went to work with courage, declaring with strength and vehemence, "the God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore, we his servants will arise and build" (Neh. 2:20).

Mary Baker Eddy writes, "Christian Scientists cannot watch too sedulously, or bar their doors too closely, or pray to God too fervently, for deliverance from the claims of evil. Thus doing, Scientists will silence evil suggestions, uncover their methods, and stop their hidden influence upon the lives of mortals" (*Mis* 114:21).

Nehemiah never gave in to discouraging thoughts like, "Well, I know that the ruins of Jerusalem are certainly overwhelming; I have a great deal to meet there, more than anybody realizes; it is a terrible responsibility and burden for me; I've never built a wall before and besides there are so many mortal laws and details connected with wall building that it makes this whole process and procedure particularly difficult and almost impossible."

It is interesting to realize that Nehemiah never actually physically fought with the three men or even argued face-to-face with them. He merely maintained his watchful guard over his own thought, filled his consciousness with the presence and allness of God, and went forward with the actual work.

And these three forms of malpractice could not do one thing to Nehemiah, they could only suggest. It might be similar to the three temptations of Jesus. The devil couldn't physically push Jesus off the pinnacle, it could only suggest that he do it himself.

In Neh. 4-7, 8, and 9, we read:

7 . . . it came to pass, *that* when Săn-băl'-lăt, 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 wrath,

8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

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9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

*Watch* in Hebrew is *mishmar* which means “to put a guard or fence around, to post a diligent watch.” Watching is something we, as Christian Scientists, are very familiar with. We are continually instructed by Mrs. Eddy to “watch.” The concept of defending thought or watching is one of the most important disciplines of metaphysical work that we can do as a Christian Scientists.

So urgently did Mrs. Eddy feel this charge to defend thought daily, against what was mentally coming at her and her Movement, that in her home, she established daily *watch* times. Those whom she called mental workers were instructed to sit quietly in their rooms and watch and pray, usually for an hour at a time. These periods she called WATCHES, after the Master’s query, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” (Matt. 26:40).

Mrs. Eddy tells us in her writings:

“The members of this Church should daily watch and pray to be delivered from all evil, from prophesying, judging, condemning, counseling, influencing or being influenced erroneously” (*Man.* 40:11).

In the *Manual*, she gives us something called “Alertness to Duty” (which is a military term).

“SECT. 6. It shall be the duty of every member of this Church to defend himself daily against aggressive mental suggestion, and not be made to forget nor to neglect his duty to God, to his Leader, and to mankind.” (*Man.* 42:4-8).

“Watch, pray, demonstrate” (*My* 254:6-7).

So, day and night, the Jews watched and worked. It says, “for the people had a mind to work” (Neh. 4:6).

They were focused, diligent, and willing. Berenice Shotwell writes, “With a sense of urgency all labored from early morning until the stars appeared at night, not putting off their clothes except for washing” (*Getting Better Acquainted with Your Bible*, pg. 138).

Together, the three forms of malpractice formed a treacherous conspiracy and united against this work with a mental wall of opposition, organized resistance, and obstruction. They mocked it and ridiculed it and made fun of Nehemiah’s men. Then Nehemiah ordered that each worker be armed with a weapon in one hand and a building implement in the other as a symbol of constructive and protective power.

These weapons were probably literal in that they held these actual tools while they worked. But more so, they were mental and spiritual, a form of offensive and defensive weaponry. Ephesians 6: 10-17 expands what our weapons of spiritual warfare might be. A study of these passages might be helpful as we prepare for this mental battle and major building project.

The word armor is “*panoplia*” in Greek, which means a full set of offensive and defensive armor—the total resources which God makes available for those who enlist under his command. Paul describes it as “Our loins girt about with truth; having the breastplate of righteousness; our feet shod with the gospel of peace; holding the shield of faith; with the helmet of salvation and the sword of the word of God.” These weapons form the panoply or offensive and defensive protective covering of a Christian.

Finally, a sneaky invitation was sent to Nehemiah to trap him away from the work on the plain of Ono, 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem, to take him off the wall and out of spiritual consciousness. The enemies had abandoned threats of violence and assumed the appearance of reasonableness through lies and deceit, and attempted to call Nehemiah to a conference.

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The temptation here was to compromise, using trickery and fraud to get Nehemiah to come down off the wall. They aggressively and arrogantly repeated this invitation *four separate times*, but Nehemiah replied in answer all four times: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Neh. 6:3)

A fifth time they tried to intimidate Nehemiah. One Christian Science article says,

“Then the Horonite sent Nehemiah a letter in which he accused the governor of a selfish motive in rebuilding the wall, alleging that it was Nehemiah’s real purpose to set himself up as a king over the Jewish people. In other words, because Nehemiah was necessarily working in a position of great responsibility requiring strong executive ability, and was pushing the work along successfully, the human mind thought it could distort the real purpose of Nehemiah by accusing him of its own desires or ambitions. His accusers could only see in Nehemiah’s actions that which they themselves would seek to do if they were placed in power. This was a flat out lie and the master builder was not much concerned, and met the accusations squarely making nothing of them” (Protection in God’s Work,” Ernest C. Moses, *The Christian Science Journal*, March 1912. Moses).

Nehemiah tells them, “There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart” (Neh. 6:8). In other words, you are lying and making all of this up.

The enemies’ final attempt at disrupting the work was to make Nehemiah afraid for his life. He was encouraged to flee for safety into the temple, into the holy place, to run and hide. Going into the inner rooms of the temple for a layman was a violation of law and would have gotten Nehemiah in all kinds of trouble and delays.

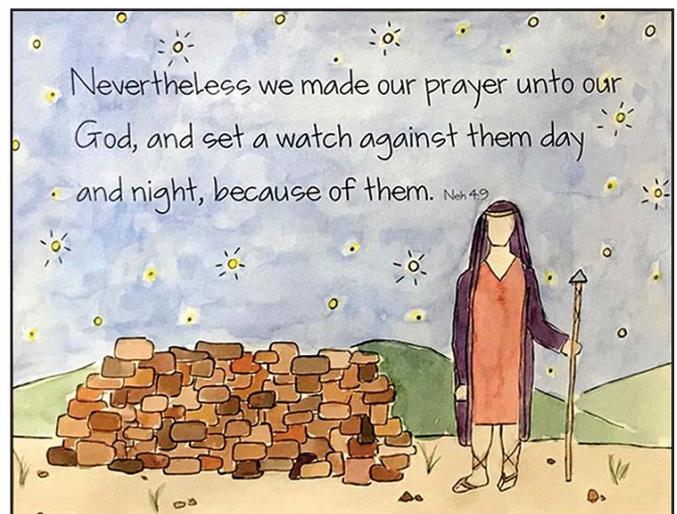
Nehemiah recognized this as a ploy, and didn’t fall for it. He says, “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (Neh. 6:9), which was translated in the Vulgate, “I strengthened my hands all the more.”

Any one of the steps that Nehemiah took in this demonstration can be used in our own treatments and healing work. We might even try to amplify and expand on one or two of them, until they become practical and demonstrable in our work. Maybe even write an article for the periodicals on one of them? Like the February 17, 1917, *Christian Science Sentinel* article “Gashmu saith it” (Neh. 6:6), such a short, tiny phrase grew to a wonderful article on handling false authority, gossip, and malpractice.

We can see many strategies of error exhibited in this story: malicious malpractice, persecution, fear of retaliation, ridicule, scorn, hatred, persistent intimidation bullying, falsehood, rumor, slander, envy, relentless desire to defeat the purpose of good, and even terrorism.

What are some of the spiritual steps that Nehemiah took in making this demonstration?

1. First, he prayed and fasted before he took any human footsteps.
2. He arrived early and prepared a plan in secret to protect his upcoming work. He relied completely on God, not persons, to show him what to do.
3. He was not distracted, fearful, or concerned by the three aggressive forms of malpractice. To his spiritual understanding, they clearly had, “no right, no portion, nor memorial.”



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4. He recognized that “the God of heaven he will prosper us.”
  5. He set a watch against them day and night with a weapon in one hand and a building tool in the other, maintaining his spiritual armor of offensive and defensive weapons.
  6. He did not give in to compromise or deceit. He affirmed he was doing a great work and could not come down.
  7. Even though he was falsely accused, he maintained his innocence and continued to work until the job was completed.

As we follow Nehemiah’s example, we are assured that spiritual-mindedness and persistence prevent deception by any of error’s subtle methods from taking hold in thought. We are awake to them, and the result of such alertness is the strengthening of God’s servant and the certain defeat of evil.

Animal magnetism, the so-called great red dragon, was handled and defeated by this tower of spiritual manhood that we call Nehemiah. His story is an example for us as students of Christian Science and can teach us how to meet these negative states and stages of consciousness as we go about building our own wall of New Jerusalem, both in individual consciousness and in the outward human experience of our churches, our families, and our healing demonstration of Christian Science.

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*A special thank you to staff member Hannah McCauley for her artwork of the Nehemiah story.*

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**For more study on Nehemiah, the following are additional articles from the Christian Science periodicals:**

“Evil: no portion, nor right, nor memorial,” Carolyn Holte,  
*The Christian Science Journal*, March 1982.

“Nehemiah and the Wall,” Ralph W. Cessna, *The Christian Science Journal*,  
October 1954.

“The Rebuilding, by Nehemiah, of the Wall of Jerusalem,” Annie F. Colt, C.S.,  
*The Christian Science Journal*, September 1889.

“Truth’s Omnipotence,” Emily A. Ashcroft, *The Christian Science Journal*,  
September 1916.

“Protection in God’s Work,” Ernest C. Moses, *The Christian Science Journal*,  
March 1912.

“He will prosper us,” Dorothy Roberts, *The Christian Science Journal*,  
August 1920.

“Gashmu saith it,” Gustavus S. Paine, *Christian Science Sentinel*,  
February 17, 1917.



*Peace Haven*

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