

Standing in the Gap

The prophet Ezekiel spoke God's message to the people in Babylonian captivity. He described the siege and the destruction of Jerusalem's walls. God told Ezekiel that He had searched for someone to *"build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land"* (Ezekiel 22:30). God found no one. So God allowed the Babylonians to destroy the city and carry the people captive. Fifty years later, the Persian king, Cyrus, released all captives and permitted them to go home. Among the first to return were Zerubbabel, also called Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak.

We learn in Ezra 3:2, that *"Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it."* But the temple and the city walls remained in ruin while the people built their own houses.

Twenty years later, God sent the prophets Zechariah and Haggai to call the people to continue the building of the temple. *"Zerubbabel, also called Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem"* (Ezra 5:2).

After another seventy years, Nehemiah received permission from the king of Persia to build the walls of Jerusalem. The first two leaders to return, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest, were busy with many problems related to settling the people and starting the sacrificial worship. There had been no leader to direct the rebuilding of the walls. Nehemiah accomplished what had been lacking, and the walls secured in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15).

What is true then is true today. No one, and sometimes, no one group can do all parts of the job. God's two appointed leaders, one descended from David and one descended from Aaron, could do their primary duties and assist in some others but not direct the extensive work of restoring the walls of Jerusalem. A third leader, for a time, stepped in to get the job done. After many years and among all the people of Israel, one man responded to *"build the wall and stand in the gap."*

Today, we have an eldership, deacons, and evangelists. They do a magnificent job watching out for our souls, caring for the needs of the saints, and keeping us comfortable in the assembly. But they cannot reach into the community with the gospel as we can. We live there. Nehemiah saw a need and asked to fill it. We can look around and see what needs are present where we live. Is there a neighbor who needs something: the gospel, food, transportation, someone to listen? Are we afraid to ask others about their needs because we are afraid of what their answer may be, or could it be beyond our capabilities? It is simple to help with food and transportation, and maybe some other physical needs or work around a house. There are solutions if you are not prepared or comfortable with teaching the gospel. You can arrange a bible study with those that are comfortable teaching.

The work of the evangelist to spread, and the teachers to teach the gospel is much easier when others of the congregation set up bible studies for them. Not everyone is a teacher, but all can invite. We can all spread the word and seek the help necessary to satisfy each need. Remember, Nehemiah did not build the wall on his own. He just recruited the helpers and showed them what was needed. What are we doing to seek out needs and the helpers to satisfy those needs?

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).