

First the Temple

**But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands You gave.... and yet, our God, You have punished us less than our sins have deserved. Shall we again break Your commands...?
--Parts of Ezra 9:10-14**

This devotional was written 9/13/2001, after the terrorist attack against America that brought down the World Trade Center.

The nation of Israel had been blessed and protected by the Almighty hand of God. But they had responded by turning their backs on Him. He was patient with them, showing mercy instead of wrath, pleading with them repeatedly over the years to return to following Him.

But they didn't return to Him. Instead, they grew more sinful, more idolatrous, more blasphemous with each passing year. They deserved to be punished.

However, God was still so merciful that He wouldn't lift His own hand to strike them. He did lift His hand of protection from them, though, and their outside enemy from Babylon came in and terrorized them, killing many, exiling more, and leaving their country in ruins. It was actually less punishment than they deserved, but it was enough to get their attention.

Later, God raised up His servant Ezra, and sent him to rebuild the temple in the Holy City of Jerusalem and restore worship of the Most High God there. Ezra's prayer on behalf of the land is found in chapter 9 of the book about his life. He acknowledged the depth of the nation's sinfulness and called upon the people to restore worship and obedience to the Lord. He pointed out to them how foolish it would be for them to respond to God's chastening by returning to their rebellious ways.

It was only after this restoration of the temple that God raised up Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall of protection around the city so that outside enemies could not harm them.

There's a formula here for restoring the security of a nation that finds itself bewildered by how unprotected we suddenly are against enemies that want to destroy our country. The formula is this: First the temple, then the wall.

We have to be restored spiritually first. Then we can count on the return of God's wall of protection which has been partially broken down this week. First we must follow the example of Ezra and return to the Lord and His

ways. Then the walls of security that protect us from the enemy can be rebuilt, a project God accomplished through Nehemiah after Ezra had paved the way by restoring temple worship in the land.

We all want to be safe. We all want to be secure. But patriotism isn't going to do it. Nor is killing our enemies, because there will be more where they came from. The best human ingenuity won't develop a security plan that protects us from acts of war and terrorism, either. And no matter how much money we spend, it will be an effort in vain if we do not have the blessing of God. That blessing of God is the ONLY reason America has EVER been great, and it is the only factor that can keep us and sustain us in the future.

First the temple, then the wall.

If we want security, we've got to stop killing 30,000 children per week in abortion centers. We've got to stop being sexually immoral. We've got to stop acting like divorce is no big deal. We've got to stop blaspheming the name of the Lord. We've got to stop worshiping money, the earth, our bodies, and other false gods. We've got to stop turning to horoscopes and psychics, and start turning to the Creator for guidance. We've got to stop "tolerantly" pretending all belief systems are created equal. (That multicultural notion was disproved handily this week. What a stark contrast there is between faith in Jesus Christ, which leads to righteousness, and belief in the cult of Islamic Jihad that just leads to more sin, more death, more suffering.) We've got to turn from our sin and come before the Sovereign God of the universe through His Son Jesus Christ, the only Savior and only Mediator between God and man.

Then we will be restored spiritually. Then we will experience God's abundant mercy and an overflow of His blessings. Then we will be safe and secure, because an all-powerful God will protect us from all enemies foreign and domestic.

Those who know the Lord Jesus Christ and walk by His Spirit have nothing to fear in this life or the next. So "let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord." (Lamentations 3:40)

First the temple, then the wall.

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