

July 4th, 2010

Open the Word of Truth to the Book of Nehemiah, chapter 1 verse 1, where God has provided an excellent case study for how nations can avoid war--military preparedness.

Before we begin our study of this biblical concept and its price, let's remember the application of 1Jo 1:9 as may or may not be necessary.

To honor America on this 4th of July weekend I thought it might be of value to think about liberty and its price. Freedom indeed has a price. It's not free, it has never been free nor will it ever be free. Liberty has always had need of soldiers with the courage to fight and die for their country. June the 6th, 1944, was aptly called by Cornelius Ryan in his book by the same name, *The Longest Day*-- that day found the price of freedom being paid all across France. I will quote a small but never-to-be-forgotten adventure chronicled in that book:

"The Longest Day was soon to come, the invasion of Normandy was about to begin, but first numerous towns and villages located on strategic roads behind enemy lines had to be secured. And only the Airborne could do that job. The Hun had to be blocked, replacements must not be permitted access to Omaha or Utah Beach; such was the assignment for the 82nd and 101st Airborne.

In wave after wave, 882 aircraft carrying 13,000 men were heading for six drop zones - all within a few miles of St. Mere-Eglise. In the square of the city everyone looked up. The burning house forgotten, no one had time to put out the fire. Warriors were tumbling out of the sky, the guns of the city began to belch a reign of terror for men whose average age was only 20; the church bell clanged to sound the alarm. This would be the last sound many of the warriors of the 82nd and the 101st would ever hear. The sound of freedom is often preceded by the sound of battle followed by terrible memories of brave men like Private Ernest Blanchard. He heard the church bell, he heard the gunfire but today he only remembers seeing a fellow paratrooper disintegrate before his very eyes.

He and his friend had jumped into the darkness just a moment before. Gunfire from the ground had detonated his friends pack of ordinance which had been wrapped snugly around his body. Private Blanchard's fellow pathfinder was now plasma, a vapor disappearing into the night; he was on his way to serve elsewhere. He wouldn't need the ordinance anymore."

Your freedom and mine all began with the Seven Years War--known in British North America as the French and Indian War. This war settled forever a century long struggle between England and France for colonial supremacy in America.

Although the thirteen English colonies had provided most of the manpower for that part of the conflict fought in America, numerous units of the British regular army had been sent from England. There had been a major commitment of forces by the Royal Navy, and the Royal Exchequer had footed all of the bills.

In a post-war assessment, the British government found that the largely self-governing colonies had emerged from the war in better economic condition than the mother country. It seemed only right to King George that the colonists should pay for their own security; their defense should no longer be a burden for the British taxpayer.

The colonists were determined that they would not pay for, nor accept, any obligations imposed upon them by a legislature in which they had no vote. "Taxation without representation is tyranny" they said. Local colonial governments met to assert their rights as British subjects. The British, however, were equally determined that the laws should be enforced. Parliament was convinced that the colonists were trying to avoid financial responsibility by placing the burdens of colonial administration and security upon England.

The people of Massachusetts took the lead in opposition to the increasingly harsh enforcement measures. In 1772, under the leadership of Samuel Adams, a "Committee of Correspondence" was secretly formed to begin planning for the use of force if necessary. There was a special outcry when it was learned King George had enacted a particularly onerous tax on tea, and thus ensued the Boston Tea party.

It was now Britain's turn to be outraged, and more intolerable acts were passed and the Port of Boston closed. In September of 1774 a convention of Massachusetts citizens met and adopted a series of resolves calling for economic action and military preparation. Militiamen began to openly train on their village greens and caches of arms were stored by the colonials for future use.

The British kept track of their actions, using spies to locate guns and powder. On April 14, 1775, General Gage sent a force of regular British soldiers under Lt. Col. Francis Smith to Boston to seize and destroy the stored ordinances. By the time Smith's force began its march, Paul Revere and others had sounded the alarm, and at Bunker Hill militia from New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Connecticut had joined with the Minutemen of Massachusetts to route the British. Four thousand colonials had routed 1800 of England's finest. The seeds of a fight for America's freedom had begun.

Later, in the spring of 1775, a proposed resolution was sent to King George by courier; it came to be known as the "Olive Branch Resolution." The headstrong king refused to even receive the courier.

Plans were immediately made in the colonies to declare their independence. A Declaration of Independence was voted in convention by the colonies on July 2, 1776, and proclaimed two days later on July 4th. The first of many wars for freedom would soon begin. Men would die because freedom had a price.

We celebrate that first July 4th today with special appreciation; special appreciation for the men in wars both here and abroad who elected to die while marching forward against a hail of shot, while flying into the night without cover to assail a waiting enemy, while sailing the great oceans to deliver covering fire, while storming the shores of

distant islands of the Pacific--all amidst terrible odds and all because they thought freedom was worth the ultimate price.

Cyrus, King of Persia, some 540 years before our Lord's birth, spoke of freedom to a small band of liberty-loving Jews, Jews who had been forcefully detained for more than three generations. Detained first along the banks of the Tigris River in 606 B.C. and then later in a place known today as the land of the Ayatollah. It was here, in what is now Iran, that King Cyrus proclaimed, "you may return to your homeland."

The story of the return from Persia, like every story of freedom is never an isolated event; it is a plan involving many. A complicated plan under God's leadership because freedom is God's first divine institution. It is God who sponsors liberty with a special verve and animated enthusiasm. Every client nation to God must provide freedom and freedom, is protected best in nations. This is God's plan.

Gen 10:5 By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

It was God who destroyed the first United Nations.

Gen 11:6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Gen 11:7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Gen 11:9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Satan's plan was, and still is, to weaken the nations and sponsor internationalism.

Isa 14:12 How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how are you cut down to the ground, you who did weaken the nations!

Much of the Bible tells of man and his quest for freedom. A client nation must provide privacy, freedom and the right of the individual to pursue a course based upon his own volition and ability within the framework of the government of his or her nation. Freedom must provide for the right to accept or reject Christ, to believe or disbelieve the Bible, and even to distort His precious Word.

Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

Acts 17:27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

The saga of freedom for the Jews of the Dispersion began c. 536 B.C. when some 50,000 intrepid but determined Jews made their way to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. A bit of history will help us understand better this story of dispersion to deliverance.

Let's stop here and take a look at several important dates and actions which will help place Nehemiah's work in proper chronological perspective.

539 B.C. Cyrus conquers Babylon (end of the Chaldean Empire)

538 B.C. Edict of Cyrus permitting Jewish repatriation

536 B.C. Return of 49,897 Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild only the temple

516 B.C. Completion and dedication of the temple

Artaxerxes I reigns as king of Persia from 465 to 424 B.C.

In 445 B.C. Artaxerxes I authorizes Nehemiah to restore Jerusalem.

The writer of Chronicles also recorded the prophecy of Isaiah.

2Ch 36:22 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

2Ch 36:23 "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you-- may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up."

A remnant would carry the seeds of freedom to plant them in the land. There they would wait with great anticipation their promised Messiah. Zerubbabel and Joshua led that first cadre of intrepid Jews back to their land of promise to plant the royal escutcheon. There would be Arabs and Samaritans in the land who would resist their efforts to rebuild the Temple, but Zerubbabel and his men would stand in the gap, militarily prepared for combat should their adversaries demand war. Later the torch of freedom would be handed to Nehemiah and his generation. It would be their turn to stand in the gap, to follow the colors to the high ground, to work within the bounds of establishment to influence yet another King; this King's name would be Artaxerxes and the year would be 445 B.C.

Men like Daniel, who served and influenced Nebuchadnezzar; men like Zerubbabel, who ministered to and influenced Cyrus; and now a man like Nehemiah would influence Artaxerxes. These men had worked their way up to positions of influence. Their progress was no accident. Their repeated promotions would be used by the Lord to determine who would control the land God had much earlier given to a special people--

Israel.

Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

The time had come to sound the toll of freedom. It would not be easy. Nehemiah not only had to summon the courage to ask for permission and assistance for the long, dangerous and arduous journey home but once there he would face the difficult task of preparing his people to fight and resist those who would attempt to foil the "will of God."

Neh 1:1 And it came to pass ... in the twentieth year, as I was in ... the palace,

Neh 1:2 That ... certain men of Judah; in response to my question about the status of those who were in Jerusalem.

Neh 1:3 ... they said, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

Neh 1:4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned ... and fasted, and prayed before God ...

Neh 1:5 I said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven ...

Neh 1:6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant ...

Neh 1:8 "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,

Neh 1:9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name ..."

God answered Nehemiah's prayer.

Neh 2:1 In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before;

Neh 2:2 so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid,

Neh 2:3 but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

Neh 2:4 The king said to me, "What is it you want?" ...

Neh 2:5 and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."

King Artaxerxes so ordered. Nehemiah set off on a journey west across deserts and mountains in search of liberty. Upon arriving in the land he found there was little to please the eye, no manifestation of freedom, no parades and flags and yet freedom very often begins with a step of faith, the use of personal choice and freedom. In the case of salvation it is a small step of faith with a giant reward.

Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There were ominous clouds of belligerence hovering over the once proud city of God. Nehemiah knew God often used the small to defeat the great. He had the warriors Gideon and David as his examples.

Jdg 7:4 But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go."

Jdg 7:5 So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink while looking around for their adversaries."

Jdg 7:6 Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

Jdg 7:7 The LORD said to Gideon, "With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you ...

1Sa 17:50 So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

1Sa 17:51 Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took Goliath's sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head ... the Philistines saw their champion was dead and fled.

Accordingly, Nehemiah called the people to repentance and tapped into the power of God: prayer bombardment began. The artillery of the Lord was called in on top of the Arabs. Nehemiah and his men prayed first and then prepared for the battle. By their display of force war would be averted.

Neh 4:9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet any threat.

Nehemiah could have been overwhelmed with gloom, fear, sadness and despair, but trepidation was and should not be found in the sheath of the Christian soldier. And so it was with Nehemiah; fear knocked at the door but courage answered.

Neh 4:7 But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod

heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.

Neh 4:8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

Neh 4:9 But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

The Jews who returned to the land did two things to provide for their freedom. They restored the authority of God's word by reinstating the priesthood, and by praying. Secondly they established a watch and they demonstrated a military preparedness.

Belligerent nations wield military force not to defend their sovereignty but to vanquish and enslave other nations. They are deterred only when confronted by a superior force. General George S. Patton has written of war: "Yes, no doubt war is unreasonable and makes little sense to a reasonable man, but 2000 years of history has shown us that only mad men make wars and the world has no shortage of mad men."

No doubt today, with military action going on in Israel, Gaza, Iraq, Iran, Kurdistan, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tibet, The Philippines, North Korea, South Korea, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Armenia, Chechnya, Sierre Leone, Syria, Lebanon, Chad, Mauritania, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Colombia, the United States of America and elsewhere, one could conclude there are still enough mad men to go around. Our Lord said, "Until I return there will always be wars and rumors of war."

Man, with his efforts at peace pipes, peace councils, treaties, leagues of nations, united nations, alliances and promises of one worldism, has perpetually whirled peace semantics about with great marbled nuances on parchments elegantly inscribed by politicians interested in elevating their own selves above the rules of God's law and national sovereignty.

The prophet Jeremiah said it best: "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace." Men worth their salt must be ready to fight and to die for their homes and their families. The nobility of this concept was captured by General Douglas MacArthur:

"The soldier, above all other men, is required to practice the greatest act of religious training--sacrifice. In battle and in the face of danger and death, he discloses those divine attributes which his Maker gave when He created man in His own image. No physical courage and no brute instinct can take the place of the Divine help which alone can sustain. However horrible the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and to give his life for his country is the noblest development of mankind ... the soldier above all other people prays for peace, for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. But always in our ears rings the ominous words of Plato 'only the dead have seen the end of war.'"

Our freedom that we celebrate today came at a price in money, life and limb, but liberty is so precious it must be guarded constantly--and so it has been since 1776. As we ponder our freedom we must keep in mind that Americans through the ages have

chosen to make a statement about freedom.

One such statement was made on February 23, 1969, in the Republic of Vietnam. PFC Oscar P. Austin went to the aid of a fallen Marine. As he neared the wounded man, a grenade hit the ground nearby.

Austin threw himself between the injured Marine and the grenade. He caught the full effect and was killed instantly. For this heroism he was awarded the Medal of Honor.

Is the resistance to an aggressor nation worth that price? Ask those survivors of the Communist killing fields of Cambodia who witnessed 1,700,000 of their families and friends murdered, ask the Rwandans who in less than three months saw 800,000 of their wives, sisters, brothers, and fellow tribesmen butchered, ask the families of the more than 2,000,000 who lost their lives resisting the Communist takeovers of Russia and China, ask the families and friends of the almost 3,000 Americans killed or horribly burned by Muslim terrorist, on September 11th.

We in the United States have been fortunate to have fought our last several wars and police actions on the soil of other lands and thus avoided the first-hand ravages of war. The reason for our blessing comes from our client nation status which spawned a brave cadre of fighting men who rose to the occasion and risked everything when duty called.

George Patton in August 1945 spoke to key members of his Third Army:

"You men have just won a great war. The record of your accomplishment speaks for itself. As a moderate estimate we killed, wounded or captured ten Germans for every American lost, killed or wounded. Now that all or nearly all of you are returning to civilian life, I believe I should continue to do my best to instruct how to save your lives and the lives of your children. I realize that in doing this I shall be criticized, but my conscience will be much clearer in the knowledge that I have done my duty as I see it. It is certain that the two world wars in which I have participated would not have occurred had we been prepared.

It is my belief that adequate preparation would have prevented or materially shortened all of our other wars beginning with that of 1812. Yet, after each of our wars there has always been the hue and cry to the effect that there will be no more wars. That disarmament is the sure road to health, happiness and peace ... These ideas spring from wishful thinking and from the erroneous belief that wars result from logical processes ... Rational men do not make wars, wars are made by madmen. It is now your duty to see that future wars do not occur. In closing let me remind you of the words of George Washington, 'In time of peace, prepare for war.' That advice gentlemen is good still today."

So, on the 4th of July in the year of our Lord 2010, let us remember with special pride not only the men who signed the Declaration of Independence but the many who later followed the colors to the high ground, making our worship in this local assembly possible.

Certainly, also, we must not forget the ultimate sacrifice by the Lord Jesus Christ when He made His way up Golgotha's hill to pay for sin and make reconciliation with God a unique possibility.

Now let's prepare for the celebration of The Lord's Table by returning your desk tops to the parade rest position, get out your hymnals and turn to page # 99 as we stand and sing the first and last verses of *When I Survey The Wonderous Cross*. Ken come and lead us as we sing.

End Lesson Taught 7-4-10