

a building identified as being David's palace. The more recent excavations reveal the remains of two towers and of a section of wall. It is this wall and towers that are attributed to Nehemiah.

The Bible records that the building of the wall took place in only fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15), a tribute to the remarkable organizational skills of the energetic Nehemiah. It should, however, be remembered that the wall was

not built from scratch, it was the rebuilding of the walls broken down in the Babylon invasion. Thus when Nehemiah arrived at Jerusalem and carried out a nighttime tour of inspection, he "viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down" (2:13).

The recently discovered wall, however, was an entirely new wall, built higher up the slope than the old wall, near the crest

of the slope. The workmanship of the wall is in fact rather poor; the stones have not been given a smooth finished face, and gaps between the stones have been hastily filled with stone chips and mortar. This fits the fact that Nehemiah's wall was completed in a hurry. Pottery finds support a dating to the time of Nehemiah.

Source: "The wall that Nehemiah built", Eilat Mazar, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Mar./Apr. 2009.

Gems from the Word

Cleansing the lepers

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MATTHEW, as well as Mark (1:40-45) and Luke (5:12-15), records this incident, an indication of just how important they thought it was. But many lepers were cleansed; what was different about this one? We shall see.

The Lord, as the context indicates, had just come down from the mountain where he had spoken the Sermon on the Mount, surrounded by great multitudes thronging him, wanting to talk to him, to ask him questions. And then he comes face to face with a leper! How did he get there? Surely lepers had to stay away from crowds and live outside the city!

No doubt this man just stood in the middle of the road, and, as he shouted "Unclean, unclean", the crowds had parted round him as they walked past until he had come in front of the Master. He knelt down (Mk. 1:40) and worshipped him (Mt. 8:2), falling on his face (Lk. 5:12), saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mt. 8:2).*

What a wonderful man this was! He did not doubt that the Lord had the power to carry out such a miracle, only that he himself was good enough! Sometimes we feel we are not good enough. How important that attitude is, for not until we recognise that we are worthless and can do nothing in our own strength can the Lord begin to do things with us, when we ask for the strength which he provides. It is a great lesson.

Matthew 8:1-4

1 When he had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean".

3 Then Jesus put out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed". Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

4 And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them".

Jesus put out his hand and touched him. No one had touched this leper for longer than anyone could remember. How important touch is!—the warmth of the handshake, the hug when a dear friend is distressed, the hand on the shoulder in reassurance. Never underestimate the power of touch. The leper had never been touched in his leprosy.

* Quotations from the NKJV unless otherwise stated.

But the contamination that everyone feared held no fears for the Lord Jesus: "I am willing; be cleansed" (v. 3). He was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15, AV), but they did not contaminate Him. We live in a world where evil abounds, and come face to face with it in all its ways every day. That is why we should never miss the Breaking of Bread, that at the table of our Lord we might receive strength that the world will not contaminate us, though we live amongst it.

The leper was cleansed, and then Jesus says, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them" (Mt. 8:4). Contrast the singular, "the priest", with the plural, "as a testimony to *them*".

Who are the "them"? Let me put the problem into a story, using the imagination. The leper goes to the priest to seek cleansing under the regulations of the Law of Moses. Imagine him knocking at the priest's door and saying, "My leprosy has been cleansed. What do I have to do?". And the priest, scratching his head, says, "Well, I have not done many lepers this year! You had better

wait while I check". Since Moses recorded those commandments concerning the cleansing of the leper, not one cleansed leper had ever been to any priest, in any generation, anywhere in Israel!

And this leper was not the only one. Can you imagine the next time this priest went up to Jerusalem for one of the feasts and met his friends? "A funny thing happened to me the other day!", he would say, and tell the story of this leper. "Strange you should mention that", says his friend, "I heard about another leper last month"; and a voice alongside says, "I had a leper too".

What did they think? Here, after 1,500 years, this law suddenly had to be used. What was happening? Who was this Jesus of Nazareth? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? "As a testimony to them", Jesus said. The Father had put this law of the cleansing of the leper into the commandments of Moses for the sole purpose of drawing attention to the work of His Son. The only man who could cleanse lepers would be the Son of God!