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‘Got him!’ What’s next?

By Elise L. Moore, C.S.B.

The capture of Saddam Hussein has thrown down a gauntlet of emotional temptations. Revenge, for one. Then there's horror, hatred, pity, pious superiority, indifference. Like land mines hidden in the field of consciousness, these emotions lie under the surface.

As a devotee of the Bible, I often search the Scriptures to find stories that might relate to present situations. I can learn from these stories how to pray to resolve current problems. But it has been difficult to find a Bible story that fits the scenario in Iraq.

For example, David, who defeated Goliath with a slingshot in his younger years, refused to kill King Saul. Saul's history was checkered. He'd been chosen by God as the first king of Israel. Then he'd lost his divine mandate through his own disobedience and jealousy. In the end, Saul was defeated in battle and died by his own hand, not David's.

Then there's Judas Iscariot, whose actions resulted in Jesus' torture and crucifixion, like the torture and death of many Iraqis. Judas realized his sin and committed suicide.

There's the story of the King of Nineveh, a truly nasty guy by historical accounts. God sent Jonah to prophesy the king's destruction along with the rest of the city unless they repented, and turned to the one God. To Jonah's dismay, the king obeyed God, repented, and commanded the city to do the same. They were all saved. However, sackcloth and ashes haven't yet been reported as part of Saddam's physical or mental wardrobe.

Nehemiah's example

I want to support a view of justice that will help the people of Iraq live in a functioning society as well as bring soldiers home safely. The one story that has given me some direction is Nehemiah rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah rebuilt a city flattened by war. He resisted terrorist attacks and avoided diplomatic intrigue. The biblical book of Nehemiah is providing some spiritual direction to my prayer.

Nehemiah galvanized a despondent and nonfunctioning populace into constructive action. He came with an official mandate. But the people didn't work ceaselessly because some foreign power ordered them to do so. They labored because they saw that God was prospering Nehemiah's work. It probably seemed obvious to them. If God was behind the reconstruction, and Nehemiah was listening to God and acting unselfishly with wisdom, then the work would be a success. They wanted to be a part of that success.

Local warlords tried to sabotage the process. But they failed because Nehemiah was tuned to God. His first thought was always obedience to God's guidance. His second was to protect the people. Personal gain, either economic or political, never entered his plans. Perhaps God prospered the work because it wasn't for Nehemiah's glory. It was for the glory of God.

Reconstruction goes on undaunted

Nehemiah stayed on task. He didn't allow thoughts of vengeance toward those who destroyed the walls to distract him. His mission was to protect the people so they could organize a functioning society. Building a wall to defend the city was the first step in fulfilling that mission. He armed the people. He maintained a state of vigilance. But Nehemiah refused to honor his enemies by worrying or stopping the reconstruction efforts.

With clarity of purpose and action, the wall was finished in 52 days. Then Nehemiah promptly put local rulers in charge of the government and worked to establish an orderly community.

There are certainly differences in the Nehemiah story and the current situation in Iraq. Nehemiah was a native son. He had permission to rebuild from the government who'd conquered his country. But foreign powers didn't involve themselves with day-to-day operations. The similarities stand out to me. Establishing a free and functioning society is the goal. The methods that work are divinely directed.

As officials decide how to proceed with Saddam Hussein and the people of Iraq, I'm praying with the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's calm demeanor and lack of emotional baggage inspire me. His wisdom in handling terrorists shows me the power of divine preparation. And his total devotion to God without thought for himself sets a standard that I aspire to.

As the founder of this newspaper, Mary Baker Eddy, wrote in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures": "When the smoke of battle clears away, you will discern the good you have done, and receive according to your deserving" (page 22).

I am praying that each person involved in Iraq be like Nehemiah. Then the smoke of battle will clear away, and the power of good will be established.

Behold, I make all things new.

Revelation 21:5