



Nehemiah 3:1-32

Together Let's Build

This is the action chapter. There is lots of action going on in Nehemiah chapter three. Building is underway, things are happening, and the walls are going up. The work is moving forward after nearly one hundred years of failure.

In this chapter Nehemiah gives us an interesting detailed account of how the Jerusalem walls and gates were rebuilt after the return of the Babylonian exiles. One of the most impressive things in the chapter are the names of people who worked on the projects, probably section leaders, some details how they accomplished the tasks, the variety of backgrounds, including women. One group of people is even singled out as being non-cooperative.

This chapter is encouraging because we are reminded that God has not forgotten our names either. He records in His work diary the names of obscure people, like you and me. If we are faithful to Him, one day He will say, Well done good and faithful servant. If we have missed the opportunities, we will one-day answer to Him as well.

REPAIRING THE GATES OF OUR LIVES

Nehemiah helps us return to the reality after experiencing ruin and tragedy in our lives. As we begin this study, let's keep in mind some principles that will help us in the repair of damaged lives. We all have spiritual walls that are in the need of repair. However, when disaster hits we need to recover these before we can make the physical repairs at hand. It is easier to build than to rebuild from scratch after a massive disaster such as hurricane Katrina.

Go ahead and grieve over your loss

The work of grief has to be done, and the sooner the better. It is ok to mourn. It is ok to cry. A great tragedy such as hurricane Katrina causes great loss. I have friends who lost everything, literally. There is a time to cry.

Resist falling into the bitterness and blame game trap

Don't fall into the blame game trap. No one knows the answer to the

Don't fall into the blame game trap. No one knows the answer to the haunting question "Why?" "Why me?" "Why my family?" However, we can remain faithful. We can trust a sovereign God under the worst conditions in life and know He will give us His sustaining grace. Job could say, "I will trust Him even though He slay me." Put your faith in the Lord. Let this be a learning time when you love Him with all of your heart, mind and soul.

Re-evaluate your life

This becomes a great time to take inventory of your life, and clarify your true values. Tragedy cannot take away an intimate personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:26-29). What really matters in your life when everything else is taken away?

Receive help from other believers

This becomes a time of ministry to one another. This is when we need each other. It is a time when the body of Christ can minister to one another without apology.

Rejoice in the Lord

When there is nothing else to rejoice in, turn your eyes upon the Lord and rejoice in Him. Look at His steadfast character and rejoice in who He is.

Reach out to others and minister to them

As you rejoice in Christ you become a blessing to others. They will see the difference in your life and the way you face realities and want to know what makes you different. As God rebuilds your inner walls, He will give you opportunities to minister to others who need Him.

As God repairs our spiritual walls, we need to take care of other walls in our lives. Homes, businesses, churches, schools are all in the need of repair after a hurricane or other man-made and natural disasters. What can we learn from Nehemiah?

Everyone worked, and they all worked together. They worked near their homes, and they all completed their assigned task.

A QUICK TOUR OF THE CITY

The construction of the wall and gates in fifty-two days was an incredible feat of organization. As Howard Voss notes, "The entire community was mobilized and was led to work harmoniously and simultaneously on all parts of the city wall, which was divided into forty or forty-one sections. Another thing that is impressive in this chapter is how the entire work force demonstrated an unquenchable dedication and an ardent enthusiasm as they strained feverishly to complete the task."

From the descriptive names of the seven gates, we get an idea of how the city functioned. The most complete Scriptural description of the walls and gates of Jerusalem are given by Nehemiah. He restored what had been there before the Babylonian exile. He had a vision of the restored city and what she would become in the future. In time the city would need the extra space once again.

Some of the workers were officials from different sections of the city of Jerusalem. People from neighboring towns and outlying areas came to work on the wall. They came even as far as Jericho and Tekoa.

The high priest, his brothers, regular priests, and their families, goldsmiths, merchants, mayors of districts were active in the reconstruction of the city walls.

The gates were very descriptive of the city life. Nehemiah names them in counter clock wise beginning with the Sheep Gate on the north east side of the city next to the temple enclosure (vv. 1, 32).

Nehemiah takes us on a tour of the work and introduces us to the repair of each section of the wall.

This chapter is organized around the seven gates, and the work of building the wall is the building of the sections between these gates all that the same time. As the sections go up simultaneously, the wall goes up around the city.

Work on the North Wall (vv. 1-5)

Gates were located at strategic places along the protecting wall. Burton Scott Easton wrote an interesting article on these ancient gates in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. The usual gateway was provided with double doors, swung on projections that fitted into sockets in the sill and lintel. Ordinarily the material was wood (Neh 2:3, 17), but greater strength and protection against fire was given by plating with metal (Ps 107:16; Isa 45:2). . . . When closed, the doors were secured with a bar (usually of wood, Nah 3:13, but sometimes of metal, 1 Ki 4:13; Ps 107:16; Isa 45:2), which fitted into clamps on the doors and sockets in the post, uniting the whole firmly (Jdg 16:3). . . . As the gate was especially subject to attack (Ezek 21:15, 22), and as to possess the gate was to possess the city (Gen 22:17; 24:60), it was protected by a tower (2 Sam 18:24, 33; 2 Ch 14:7; 26:9), often, doubtless, overhanging and with flanking projections. Sometimes an inner gate was added (2 Sam 18:24). ”

Even the farmers slept in the cities and went out to work in their farms during the day. Open-air markets were held near these gates.

The Sheep Gate (3:1, 32) is where the sheep and the animals were brought in for the daily sacrifices in the temple. This is also where we must begin our lives. Jesus is the Lamb of God who lifts up and takes away the sin of our lives. This gate must be kept in repair if we are to be mature servants of Christ.

Various towers around the wall are mentioned where guards would be stationed to watch out for enemies.

There was the Fish Gate (v. 3) where fresh fish were brought in daily from the rivers, Sea of Galilee and the coast and sold in the market (cf. 13:16).

Work on the West Wall (vv. 6-12)

He takes us by the Old Gate (v. 6), and then the Valley Gate (v. 13), which led out of the city into the Kidron Valley, was repaired.

Valley, was repaired.

Work on the South Wall (vv. 13-14)

Refuse Gate (v. 13) or likely the Ash heaps led to the Hinnon Valley south of the city where the garbage and refuse was carried out daily and burned. Every city has to have garbage collectors. Do you have some spiritual trash in your life that needs to be taken to the dump?

Work on the Southeast Wall (vv. 15-27)

Fountain Gate (v. 15) seems to be in the historic district where the tombs of David were located, the House of the Mighty men, the king's garden, etc. David and his descendents were buried in this area. The gate was at the end of the Pool of Siloam.

The Court of the guard (v. 25) may have been part of Solomon's great courtyard near his palace. There was also a Water Gate (v. 26) located at the Spring of Gihon where Hezekiah's tunnel begins. This is the place where Ezra read the Law of God to the people (chapter 8).

Work on the Northeast Wall (vv. 28-32)

Then we pass by the work on the Horse Gate (v. 28), the East Gate (v. 29) was directly east of the temple area, and the Inspection Gate (v. 31). The Hebrew word of Inspection means the appointed place. ”

The Sheep Gate brings us back to where we began the tour in verse one.

EXAMPLE OF NEHEMIAH'S ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

Every student of Nehemiah cannot miss the excellent administrative abilities God has blessed Nehemiah with. He was God's man in God's place at the right time and God used him mightily.

Break the big project down into manageable sections

Nehemiah broke the big project down into small pieces so he could coordinate all the efforts. He broke the task of wall building down into manageable sections. The tour he gives us demonstrates his leadership ability. He had managers at each section of the wall. The truly amazing thing is the whole wall was being built at the same time. He did not begin in one spot and go from there around the city. Nehemiah had people working on the wall in strategic locations all along the wall all at the same time. Many sections were being built at the same time. When the parts were completed, the whole wall was completed. It took a coordinated effort on the part of everyone working at the same time at his or her assigned workstation.

Nehemiah was good at detailed planning. He could visualize the big picture and the steps needed to get there. There were about forty-one separate segments of the wall that needed to be repaired all at the same time. He did not take one section at a time, but had organized work groups all working in their sections at the same time. The big awesome task that had failed in the past one hundred years now was a possibility in record-breaking time. Each necessary section of the wall and its gates were done accordingly.

Nehemiah delegated the work

One of the interesting ways he got the job done was capitalizing on the self-preservation motive. Many of the people worked opposite his house (v. 10), in front of their house (v. 23), beside his house (v. 23), and in front of his house (vv. 29, 30). It did not bother Nehemiah that they worked near by their homes or businesses. That provided great motivation and assurance that they would do their best work.

Nehemiah delegated the responsibility and authority for each section of the wall. What they did was important because it affected the security and survival of their lives, their family and city. The names of forty-one section heads are listed in chapter three.

Get everyone involved in the project

It is utterly amazing how people of all classes will work together when properly motivated. They came from all walks of life and professions. These workers were not all builders by trade. There were priests, Levites, rulers and common people, gatekeepers and goldsmiths, pharmacists, merchants, temple servants, women — everyone except the nobles (v. 5). Hard labor must have been beneath their dignity. Everyone except the noblemen put their hands to the task. That is a tragedy because they lost the opportunity to serve. Hard work is not beneath the dignity of God's people, pastors included.

What a contrast to the noblemen in verse five is Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section. He not only finished his section but also zealously repaired another section. Nehemiah added a word about his work that he did not use elsewhere for another worker. He earnestly or with zeal repaired the other section of the wall. He took his work seriously with all of his heart and soul. He gave his very best effort and then some.

The Holy Spirit has so equipped the Body of Christ with His gifts that there should never be a need or ministry that goes unmet if every believer exercised his spiritual gift.

Let's walk around the construction of the wall with Nehemiah.

The high priest and his family were working on the Sheep Gate, and the wall of the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel (v. 1).

The Levites and priests from the surrounding lower Jordan valley carried out repairs (v. 22).

Next along our tour are the men of Jericho (v. 2) which was a good journey from Jerusalem. There were also volunteers from Tekoa about twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah, Beth Hakkerem, Beth Zur, and Keilah (vv. 5, 7).

Goldsmiths (vv. 8, 31, 32) made repairs along the side of perfumers (v. 8). These were skilled craftsmen, not crude carpenters.

Mayors and public officials were working at several points along the wall. They were rulers or mayors of subdivisions in the city. Nehemiah points them out as the official of half the district of Jerusalem (vv. 9, 12, 14-15).

Women (v. 12) worked alongside other family members. The daughters of Shallum worked with their father.

Recognize all of your workers

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Nehemiah seems to have recognized the accomplishments of each worker, notes James Boice. On his tour you get the impression that Nehemiah took time to get to know his workers and called them by name and praised them. How sad at rewards day in many churches the nobles are awarded the plaques and certificates, when the unsung heroes are the ones who built the walls. This recognition of leaders we have borrowed from secular organizational development is not edifying to the whole body of believers.

Have you noticed that in this long list of names one name is missing? It is Nehemiah! He did not have to toot his own horn. He did not have to tell anyone how busy he had been. He gave the credit to others. The bottom-line for Nehemiah was the recognition that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God (6:16). The one person who should get all the glory on awards day is our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. There are no forgotten names on God's wall of fame. Two thousand five hundred years after the event we are reading the names of families who worked on the project. All who labor for the kingdom of God will receive their true recognition when we stand before our Lord. The highest rewards we will ever receive are His words, "Well done good and faithful servant."
2. God's kingdom needs the involvement of the whole community as demonstrated by the representatives of crafts, trades, neighboring towns, and all social classes. The best testimony and most efficient work are always done as we work together to build God's kingdom.
3. It is sad but true there is the clear statement: their nobles did not support the work of their masters (v. 5). Be not discouraged, every team has one or two of the nobles on board.
4. God uses the whole body of Christ to reach a lost world. In Nehemiah we find a strong, assertive leader with the organizational skills necessary to rebuild a destroyed city. However, even Nehemiah needed priests, goldsmiths, apothecaries, administrators, the women, the Levites, the politicians and merchants. The apostle Paul teaches us the same thing in Ephesians 4:11-13, Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Everyone in the body of Christ needs everyone else. We need each other when God invites us to join Him in what He is doing.
5. One of the men who worked on the wall was named Meshullam meaning, devoted. To get any great task completed takes utter absolute dedication on the part of all of God's people.

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