

Nehemiah 3: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Nehemiah chapter 3. Then Elisha the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the sheep gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the tower of the hundred, as far as the tower of Hananel. And next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zachar the son of Imri built. The sons of Hassaneah built the fish gate.

They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts and its bars. And next to them Merrimoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakoz, repaired. And next to them Meshulam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshazabel, repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Beanna, repaired. And next to them the Tekoites, repaired. But their nobles would not stoop to serve their lord. Joidah the son of Paseah, and Meshulam the son of Bessadiah, repaired the gate of Yashanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts and its bars. And next to them repaired Melittiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Moronethite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province beyond the river.

Next to them Uziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired. And they restored Jerusalem as far as the broad wall. Next to them Rephiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. Next to them Jadiah the son of Hurumath, repaired opposite his house. Next to him Hathosh the son of Hashabneah, repaired. Malkijah the son of Harim, and Hashab the son of Pehath-Moab, repaired another section, and the tower of the ovens. Next to him Shalom the son of Haloresh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. He and his daughters. Hanan and the inhabitants of Zenoa repaired the valley gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the dung gate. Malkijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-Hakarim, repaired the dung gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts and its bars.

And Shalom the son of Colhose, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the fountain gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts and its bars. And he built the wall of the pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David.

[2 : 1 7] After him Nehemiah the son of Asbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-Zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men.

After him the Levites repaired. Rehum the son of Benai. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. After him their brothers repaired. Bavi the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. Next to him, Ezah the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent, the armory at the buttress. After him Beirut, the son of Zabai, repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib, the high priest. After him Merrimoth, the son of Uriah, son of Hakus, repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. After them Benjamin and Hashab repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah, the son of Maaseah, son of Aniah, repaired beside his own house.

After him Benui, the son of Henadad, repaired another section from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. Pelal, the son of Uzzi, repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Podiah, the son of Perush, and the temple servants living on Ophel, repaired to a point opposite the water gate on the east and the projecting tower. After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower, as far as the wall of Ophel. Above the horse gate, the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. After them Zadok, the son of Imah, repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah, the son of Shekhaniah, the keeper of the east gate, repaired. After him Hananiah, the son of Shalamiah, and Hanan, the sixth son of Zelav, repaired another section. After

him, Meshulam, the son of Berechiah, repaired opposite his chamber. After him Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the muster gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. And between the upper chamber of the corner and the sheep gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired. Nehemiah chapter 3 lists the builders of the various sections of the wall of Jerusalem. It begins with Eliashib the high priest, who with his brothers the priests, arose and built the sheep gate. Their arising and building picks up the language of verse 18 of the preceding chapter. And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, Let us rise up and build.

So they strengthened their hands for the good work. The wall was not being built from scratch, but apart from a few sections was being repaired. Earlier in Artaxerxes reign, as we see in Ezra chapter 4, there had been an attempt to build it up. That attempt to rebuild had been halted by the command of the king, following the letter from Reham and Shimshai that he had received accusing Jerusalem of being a rebellious city. The work at that time had been progressing speedily, and so the matter was dealt with with some urgency. Presumably after that time, parts of the wall were torn down and gates were burned. However, one can imagine that whereas the wall was completely ruined or absent in some places, in others it was merely in a state of serious disrepair. This might help to explain why Hanan and the inhabitants of Zenoa could repair 1,000 cubits of the wall, around 1,500 feet or 500 meters. The part that they worked on went from the valley gate to the dung gate, which is the initial section of the wall that Nehemiah had inspected in chapter 2. Within the descriptions of the various working parties, some are described as rebuilding, while others are spoken of as repairing.

[6 : 06] The fact that verses 1 to 3 speak of building might imply that the northwestern part of the wall was the most seriously destroyed, and had to be almost completely built up from the ground. The temple was situated towards the north of the city, within the city walls. The description of the rebuilding moves down the west side of the city, from the sheep gate in the north to the dung and fountain gates in the south. This part is done in verses 1 to 15, and then it moves up the east side of the city, from the fountain gate back to the sheep gate in verses 16 to 32. This completes the wall on all sides. Some groups worked on two parts of the wall, Meremoth the son of Uriah, the men of Tekoa, Hananiah and Hanan, Malkijah and Hashab, Binyuai, Ezer and Baruch. Some of the gates mentioned in this chapter are mentioned elsewhere in scripture. The sheep gate, for instance, is mentioned in the New Testament and John's gospel.

It was particularly associated with the place of the temple. The fish gate is mentioned in 2nd Chronicles chapter 33, where Manasseh, after his repentance, did building work on it. It's also mentioned in Zephaniah chapter 1 verse 10. Uzziah built towers at the valley gate in 2nd Chronicles chapter 26. The dung gate led out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, infamous as a site of idolatry prior to the exile. There are other gates that are only mentioned in this chapter. The principal gates of the city were at the north, the sheep and fish gates, the west, the old gate or the gate of Yashana and the valley gate, and the south, the dung and the fountain gates. No gates are mentioned on the east side of the city. The east gate of verse 29 is the east gate of the temple, not of the city. The horse and muster gates were also gates to the temple. Among the workers on the wall were people from surrounding towns and villages, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, Jericho, Zenoa, among others.

Mark Throntvite observes that the involvement of people from the neighbouring towns and villages would have had the salutary effect of strengthening their bonds with the city of Jerusalem. We can also imagine that the involvement of many different groups of people from different towns and villages, different classes, different walks of life, different stations in society, would have had a democratising effect for society in Jerusalem and would have knit the members of the society much more strongly together. A number of Persian administrators in the region also participated in the building effort. The rebuilders were often assigned parts of the wall near to their own dwellings. One can imagine that this provided an added incentive to perform scrupulous work.

It would also have made it easier to apportion responsibility in a manner that minimised dispute. The list of this chapter likely comes from a hand other than Nehemiah's. As HGM Williamson observes, in Nehemiah's own first-person account, the completion of the work doesn't occur until chapter 6, and even then the doors, bolts and bars of the gates are not put in place.

[9 : 05] A work of this scale with so many participants presumably required a lot of supervision, but the emphasis of this chapter is upon the unified effort of willing participants. The unity of this chapter is less seen in the supervisor who oversees an entire project, but in the union of intent and will of a great company of people.

A question to consider. The list of builders in this chapter contains many different groups, groups that are defined by various principles. It starts with the high priest and other priests, men defined by their religious vocation, and then has the men of Jericho, men defined by their belonging to a particular city. How many other different types of groups can you identify?

Bye.