

# BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

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## The Book of Nehemiah – Chapters 3 and 4

### CHAPTER 3

#### (Nehemiah 3:1-2) Builders near the Sheep Gate.

**Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built.**

Nehemiah 3 is all about work - how individuals pitched in and did the work together, coordinated and led by Nehemiah.

The work is described in reference to the gates of the wall. The gates were the critical entry and exit points to the city, and the places most likely to see an enemy attack. Therefore, the work started at each gate and worked out from there.

- The Sheep Gate was so named because it was the gate where shepherds brought their flocks to sell them. Up until a few years ago, this same gate was being used for this same purpose in Jerusalem.

**Eliashib the high priest:** This was the first worker mentioned. He rose up to do the work with the other priests, and they worked at rebuilding the Sheep Gate and the section of wall near there.

- Eliashib the high priest acted as a godly leader should; he was out in front of the work, leading by example. He did not act as if he was too "spiritual" for the hard work of rebuilding the walls.

**They consecrated it:** The idea behind consecration is to recognize something as special, as uniquely set apart for God's glory and service. These city gates were made special to God.

**Made repairs:** The word for repairs is the Hebrew word *chazaq*, used 35 times in this chapter alone. It has the idea of strengthening, encouraging, of making something strong (Kidner). These are principles that have application to far more than material gates and walls.

#### (Nehemiah 3:3-5) Builders near the Fish Gate.

**Also the sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, made repairs. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.**

### Verse 5

The Tekoites did their work. The people of the city of Tekoa were more than willing to work - but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord. For the most part, people joined in - but not

everybody. These nobles from the city of Tekoa thought they were above the hard work, so they didn't join in.

- Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they wouldn't submit - they would not "bend their necks" to what the LORD wanted them to do. The real issue was submission. Maybe they thought they had a better plan, maybe they didn't like how Nehemiah was doing it. Whatever their reason, you can be sure they later regretted it, because they stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who did not join in the work.

### **(Nehemiah 3:6-12) Builders near the Old Gate.**

**Moreover Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and hung its doors, with its bolts and bars. And next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor of the region beyond the River. Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Also next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. And next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabniah made repairs. Malchijah the son of Harim and Hashub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs.**

#### **Verse 6**

Moreover, Jehoiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate: Among the repairers of the Old Gate and its nearby walls was Uzziel, the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths. Alongside him was Hananiah, one of the perfumers.

- These were men of different professions, not professional builders. They were not trained for this kind of work. It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do anything, but they jumped in and did the work. They fortified Jerusalem, even though many would not think they were qualified or able.

**The Broad Wall:** Today you can see in Jerusalem the remains of this Broad Wall — and broad it is, more than 20 feet (6 meters) wide. Critics had denied the accuracy of Bible history like this, but the archaeologist's shovel constantly confirms the truth of the Bible.

**Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs in front of his house:** Five times in the Nehemiah 3, it speaks of those who worked on the section right in front of their house. Often, we need to give attention to the work of God right at our own homes. If the work needs to be done anywhere, it needs to be done at our homes.

The names of the men who are said to have made repairs in front of his house are interesting:

Nehemiah 3:10 mentions **Jedaiah**, and his name means **He who calls unto God**. Our homes must be places of prayer, where the family calls unto God.

Nehemiah 3:23 mentions **Benjamin**, and his name means **Son of my right hand**, speaking of a protector. Our homes must be places of protection and peace.

Nehemiah 3:29 mentions **Zadok**, and his name means **Justice**. Our homes must be places of justice and integrity, especially with integrity regarding our marital vows and promises.

Nehemiah 3:30 mentions **Meshullam**, and his name means **Devoted**. Our homes must be places of devotion and separation to God.

### **Observations on Nehemiah 3.**

1. This chapter shows the need for believers to work together to accomplish something.
2. The work done was a reflection on the family - almost everyone mentioned is mentioned as the son of someone.
3. Evidence of Nehemiah's leadership.

## **CHAPTER 4**

Nehemiah has taught us that anytime we begin to do God's will in our life or the life of the church we will encounter opposition.

As we come to Nehemiah 4, everything seems to be going wrong all at once. In chapter one there is the spotlight on how Nehemiah prayed, in chapter two you see how God moved him from the prosperity of Persia to the desolation of Jerusalem. In chapter 3 there is the introduction to the wall workers and the discovery that in kingdom work, no one can do everything, but everyone can do something. And, because some worked harder, and Baruch worked with more zeal than anyone else, the construction project was really zipping along...But when we come to chapter 4, things start to get more complicated for Nehemiah.

### **THE WORK IS RIDICULED**

**[Neh 4:1-3 KJV] 1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite [was] by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.**

Sanballat and Tobiah were first deeply disturbed when they heard a man wanted to help the people of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:10). Then they used scorn and intimidation to prevent the work from starting (Nehemiah 2:19). Now that the work had begun, they were furious and very indignant.

### **NEHEMIAH PRAYED**

**[Neh 4: 4-5 KJV] 4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: 5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked [thee] to anger before the builders.**

Nehemiah's response was a great example. He didn't debate, he didn't form a committee, he didn't even deal with the two enemies directly. Instead, he took it to God in prayer.

For Nehemiah, prayer was a first resource, not a last resort. When times of opposition come, God wants us to rely on Him - and the purest way of expressing our reliance on God is through prayer.

### **OPPOSITION TO THE WORK**

**[Neh 4:6-8 KJV] 6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work. 7 But it came to pass, [that] when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, [and] that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, 8 And conspired all of them together to come [and] to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.**

The wall workers were initially excited. They began the work with great anticipation and joy. It says of them in Neh 4:6 that “We kept at it, repairing and rebuilding the wall. The whole wall was soon joined together and halfway to its intended height because the people had a heart for the work”.

The gaps were beginning to be closed: The wall was only half as high as it should be, but it was almost continuous now. Therefore, the enemies of the work became very angry.

- In order for the city of God to be secure they had to close the gaps.
- If the wall was going to function like it should the gaps had to be closed to prevent the enemy from infiltrating the camp.

The reason for their hatred can be found in verse 6, “for the people had a mind to work.”

### **THEY OVERCAME THE DISCOURAGEMENT**

**[Neh 4:9 KJV] 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.**

**We made our prayer to God:** Nothing would make them stop depending on God through prayer. Nehemiah **PRAYED** and the People **PRAYED**.

**We set a watch:** They also knew that prayer didn't mean they were to do nothing. They used sanctified common sense to do what they should have, protecting against attack, using willing servants of God to be the wall until the wall was built.

### **CHALLENGES FROM INSIDE AND OUTSIDE**

**(Neh 4:10) The challenge from the inside: discouragement among the people because the work seemed too big.**

10. Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall."

Judah was supposed to be the strongest, bravest tribe. It was the tribe of great kings and ultimately, the Messiah Himself. It was a special challenge and a discouragement to have this word come from the tribe of Judah.

**There is so much rubbish:** The work of rebuilding the walls was not only construction, but cleaning and hauling away the rubbish. The ruins of the walls, lying in waste for 100 years, had become a collecting point for all kinds of rubbish.

- Clearing away the rubbish was not an option - it had to be done. The destroyed parts of the wall and the accumulated rubbish had to be cleared away so the walls could be rebuilt upon their foundations. If they didn't do this, the walls wouldn't stand at all.
- In our Christian life, nothing much can be built for God's glory unless rubbish is swept away as well. Taking out the garbage can be discouraging work - but it must be done.

**(Nehemiah 4:11) The challenge from the outside: the enemies plan a surprise attack.**

**And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.”**

Verse ten may mark the lowest point in the spirits of those doing the work. Things were already in a bad state, and the discouraged workers felt like giving up. Now, the enemy planned its raid on the workers, to crush those rebuilding the walls.

Kill them and cause the work to cease: The enemies of God's people paid a back-handed compliment by saying this. They knew by now the only way to get them to stop serving God and doing His work was to kill them.

- This cannot be said of every servant of God today. For many, the devil does not have to kill them because discouragement, compromise, money, relationships, frustration, or trouble get them to stop serving God.

**(Nehemiah 4:12) God allows the Jews to be warned about the coming attack.**

So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.”

**The Jews who dwelt near them came:** This is a wonderful example of the power and goodness of God. The enemies of God and His people did their best, but God was always in control. The enemies did not know there were faithful Jews listening to their plotting.

**(Nehemiah 4:13-14) Nehemiah organizes the defense.**

**Therefore, I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”**

Nehemiah commanded them to bring out their armor. It was time to get serious, to put on the full armor, and to get ready to fight with every resource they had.

- Nehemiah put their mind in the right perspective. The challenge was great but there was no reason for fear. He who was in them was greater than he who was in the world.
- Nehemiah reminded them what they were fighting for. We fight most effectively for the Lord when we keep in mind how much there is to lose.

**(Nehemiah 4:15) The enemies shrink back.**

**And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work.**

Once they saw the defenses of the people of God, the enemies shrunk back. They didn't want a battle because they knew they would lose. What the enemies wanted was for the people of God to hand them the victory on a silver platter through failing to watch and be ready.

**(Nehemiah 4:16-18) The sword and the trowel.**

**So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the**

house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

Some of the servants did the work of **defending** and some did the work of **building**. The workers had a sword at their side and a trowel in their hands to get the work done. **The kingdom of God is built with both a sword and a trowel**, a sword to come against every spiritual force of wickedness in high places, and trowel to do the work of building up the people of God.

**(Nehemiah 4:19-23) Plans are made to keep a ready defense.**

Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.” So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

Nehemiah knew they had to keep in communication if the work was going to be done. The trumpets were a new way of communication there to meet the challenge.

**Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there:** They stayed ready to sound the alarm at the slightest notice. They would not be caught off guard.

They dedicated themselves to the work all the more, working hard from sunrise to past dark, even spending the night out at the job site to protect against attack.

They kept their clothes on all the time because they did not want to be caught unprepared. They were always ready to respond to the blast of a trumpet.