

# WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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## STUDY NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

### Chapter 3: Wall Builders

We're going to look at Nehemiah chapter 3 as a unit, and although it can, at first glance, seem like a list of names, but it's actually a very important chapter, and it's important for two main reasons.

The first reason is this—it demonstrates to us that God is interested in people. All of these men and women actually built something for God, and God made sure their names got into the Bible. That's pretty exciting, isn't it? So God cares about the individual. He cares about you and he cares about me.

The second reason it's important is because the whole book is about building. And today we're looking at the chapter when they were actually doing the building.

The whole of Scripture "testifies of our Lord Jesus"--Nehemiah 3 no less than John 3. So what is our Lord doing in this book and in particular this chapter? He is giving all of God's people a part in His work. Unlike Nehemiah, our Lord could have done it all by Himself. But He chose to do otherwise. He chose to employ His people. He did this in the Gospels. He was a tireless preacher, of course, but He didn't do all of the preaching Himself. Luke 10 has Him sending out "seventy others" to say "The kingdom of God has come near to you". No one ever performed more miracles than He yet He didn't do it all. Mark 3 finds Him sharing this "power to heal and cast out devils" with the Apostles.

It is also needful to observe: He didn't limit His work to a handful of trusted aides. He gave everyone something to do. New converts were told, "Go and tell what great things God has done for you". Women were assigned a crucial role in His ministry: Mary, Joanna, Suzanna, and other devout ladies underwrote Him and His disciples, see Luke 8:1-3. Not even children were excluded; Did He now allow them to proclaim Him "King of Israel"?

In the days of His flesh, everyone was welcome in His service! But what about now? At Pentecost, He "poured out His Spirit on all flesh"--young and old, male and female, professional and blue-collar. Why were they given the Spirit? To provide a thrill? Of course not! He was given to equip them for serving Christ. This means all believers, then and now, have a part in the work of Jesus Christ. We all have something to do for Him. We all have a little place on the wall. Jesus Christ urges you to take out the trowel and get to work.

#### **Why Build?**

Why did they build? What prompted them to do it? Why were they interested in building? I think that while we don't see it directly in this chapter, we have already seen that when Nehemiah arrived, Jerusalem was in disrepair - there was a shame, a mocking that was going on. God's reputation was tied up with Jerusalem because Jerusalem was the place where God

'dwelt'. Originally the temple was in ruins. That had now been rebuilt. But when you see the walls of the city in ruins, what are you going to think about God? "Oh, so *your* God is the kind of god that allows his precious city to fall into ruin, is he?" This is the problem we have today, of course, because many people look at the Church, particularly in the West, and say it's in ruins. It's a mess. So they were concerned for the glory of God.

So why build? **We build because our motivation for the work is that God may be glorified.** We're not like the people who built the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:4. Those people said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

You will notice that when Nehemiah comes to the people, he actually, in the short-term, doesn't promise them anything. He doesn't say, "I'm going to give you lots of money if you work." Instead he says, "I'll give you sweat." It's a bit like when Winston Churchill said— "All I have to offer you is blood and sweat and tears . . ." and the whole nation of Britain rose up as one man. Why? Because we have a desire within us to live for something bigger than ourselves. A reason, if you like, beyond ourselves. **Living for the glory of God.**

If you live for the glory of God, then a number of things become the norm. It becomes normal to love God, it becomes normal to have a passion for his Church, to care about his bride, the bride that so many people are negative about today, hateful about, say all sorts of evil things about. God loves his bride and God loves his glory, and he loves those who love his glory. The question is very simply this - will we do what God's glory deserves? It's not so much what God will do for us. It's what we can do for God and for his glory. What can we do for God's glory?

### **The Record of the Builders.**

**Builders near the Sheep Gate (v.1-2):** 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.

- **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. He 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.
- **Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built:** Every man's work was important, and though these did not work on a gate, they did the important job of building up the walls of protection and security for Jerusalem.

**The Fish Gate (v.3-5):** This gate got its name because of the nearby fish market.

- **The sons of Hassenaah** did the work of rebuilding the gate while others helped.

- **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.
- **Next to them the Tekoites made repairs:** For the most part, these people joined in - but not *everybody*. The 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.

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

- **Moreover Jehoiada:** 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.

The most important ability in the work of the LORD is **availability**. The one with few gifts and little talent, who has a passion and a drive to see God's work done, will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who doesn't have the passion and drive to do the LORD's work.

- **Rephaiah the son of Hur, leader of half the district of Jerusalem:** He worked on this section of the wall. Here was another **leader** who knew real leadership is getting down and doing it - being a servant, instead of expecting others to do it for you.
- **Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs:** 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.

**Jedaiah**, 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.

- **Malchijah son of Harim:** This man is mentioned in Ezra 10:31 as one of the men who was confronted by Ezra for the sin of taking on a pagan wife. That was many years before this, so **Malchijah** got things right with God and now, years later, he served Him. A believer should never let a past failure get in the way of serving God. Repent, set it right, make a stand for righteousness - and get on serving the LORD.

### **Builders near the Water Gate (v.26-27):**

- **The Tekoites repaired another section:** The section of wall near the Water Gate saw some remarkable service. Apparently, the **Tekoites** weren't satisfied with the significant work they did before - they went on to do even more work. They weren't going to let the bad example of their nobles who did no work (3:5) keep them from working above and beyond the call of duty.

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

1. This chapter shows the need for believers to work together to accomplish something.
  - a) It pleased God to see His people working together in one accord, with one heart, with one mind. God will put us into situations where we *must* work together, and learn how to lead, how to follow, how to work together with one heart and mind.
  - b) The wall was continuous. Any gap compromised the entire structure. Therefore, each space at the wall was important - even if someone did not think so. As well, the wall could never be strong if someone was tearing it down at a different section.
2. The work done was a reflection on the family - almost everyone mentioned is mentioned as the *son of* someone.
  - a) It is in the family that our children learn how to work, and parents must be committed to teaching their children how to be hard workers. In a spiritual sense, our hard work - or lack of it - is a reflection on our spiritual family. Each Christian should be a good reflection of their spiritual family.
3. Evidence of Nehemiah's leadership.
  - a) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made each man accountable for his work. Each man had a section of wall he was responsible for, and it was known he was responsible for it. No one wanted it to be seen that they were a poor worker in God's cause.
  - b) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he noted who did the work and who didn't - the list demonstrates this.
  - c) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he organized the work for maximum efficiency. Everyone had their section, and the work was organized around the gates - the places most needful of the work.

d) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he knew where to start. He began with the spiritual aspect of the work (the high priest's work is mentioned first), and by consecrating everything to God.

e) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he got both "high" and "low" to join together in doing the work. The leaders and the high priest worked together with the man who lived in a single room.

f) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he was willing to let people try new things - goldsmiths, priests, and perfumers all became construction workers.

g) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he made people focus on their own house first.

h) Nehemiah was an effective leader because he didn't disqualify people because of a past of sin and compromise

## **Conclusion**

The Spirit of God moved the Jews to rebuild the city walls in fifty-two days! He moved them to work simultaneously, united them, led them, provided for them, enabled them and blessed them. Each work-group faithfully focused on his part of the work and was not overly distracted by the other groups around them. Nehemiah's name is not mentioned once in this entire chapter. Though it is obvious that he was diligently watching over the work, encouraging the men and doing his best in every way, he was aware that God was the Builder, not him. So he was careful to 'stay out of the way' as much as possible (both in pre-eminence and in supervising), and allowed God to work and the men to work with God. God desires to lead each of us personally. The Christian life is a personal walk with God. God-appointed leaders are part of God's plan but they must not usurp God's central role in a Christian's life!