

The Rebuilding of the Gates and Walls

Nehemiah 3

The Preparation

Coordination

The great task of rebuilding the walls was accomplished in an orderly manner. In this chapter we are given details of the work. We find the names of many who were involved, of course every individual that played a part is not mentioned, probably only those that led in the work. Many of the laborers were inhabitants of Jerusalem so the work was beneficial personally. There were also those that traveled from a distance in order to do their part. The great production was a result of their dedication. This passage remains a testimony to their faith in God (Hebrews 11:6). They worked because they believed rebuilding the walls was good and necessary. For them, God's work was worth the sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2). Let's examine our hearts to see if we find that same desire.

The work was divided up between the people and it appears they labored where they fit best. For example, the men from Jericho worked near the sheep gate, which was located on the side of the city they would enter when arriving from home. Those that resided in Jerusalem worked near their place of business or residence. This practical planning made it easier for the workers to get involved. What we notice about Nehemiah is that the work never removed his concern for the Jews. The Lord's work is about people, whether it's rebuilding the walls or building a church. Apparently there was no strife or problems between the laborers. They worked at the same time for a similar goal, each being faithful to their assignment while trusting others to do the same. Problems occur when people become discontent with what they are given (Philippians 4:11-13). Looking upon what others have they become

*"Only men of great heart, great preparation, and great power with God achieve anything worth while."
B. H. Carroll*

filled with envy, which leads to bitterness and strife. This can occur with possessions or positions of service. Remember, correct service produces glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Nehemiah and the Jews were able to rebuild the walls because God's work was important to them. Since it was taken seriously, they planned, organized, and put great effort into it.

Construction

Twelve gates surrounded Jerusalem but only ten were mentioned in this chapter (Nehemiah 12:39). Nothing is said of the Ephraim or Prison gate. Either no work was required or the labor was not documented. Something else that grabs the attention is the fact that four of the rebuilt gates mention nothing about locks or bars. It is possible these four, Fish, Water, Horse, and Miphkad Gate, remained guarded and opened at all times.

Chapter Outline

I. The Preparation

- A. Coordination
- B. Construction

II. The Project: *Nehemiah 3:1-31*

- A. Sheep Gate: *Nehemiah 3:1-2*
- B. Fish Gate: *Nehemiah 3:3-5*
- C. Old Gate: *Nehemiah 3:6-12*
- D. Valley Gate: *Nehemiah 3:13*
- E. Dung Gate: *Nehemiah 3:14*
- F. Fountain Gate: *Nehemiah 3:15-25*
- G. Water Gate: *Nehemiah 3:26-27*
- H. Horse Gate: *Nehemiah 3:28*
- I. East Gate: *Nehemiah 3:29*
- J. Miphkad Gate: *Nehemiah 3:31*

The work itself involved four elements. They were to remove unnecessary materials, anything that was ruined beyond repair or hindered the work. The workers were to rebuild that which was salvageable. This meant they were to determine what was good or bad, remove excess, and build on what remained. They were to repair that which was found to be weak, places where the structure remained but pieces were falling off. Finally, they were to strengthen, fortify, what they found to be good. This only occurred in one place, near the broad wall. The work itself was physically demanding. Those involved sacrificed much time and effort to rebuild the city. Praise the Lord for those that seek to do His work no matter what the cost (Luke 14:27-35).

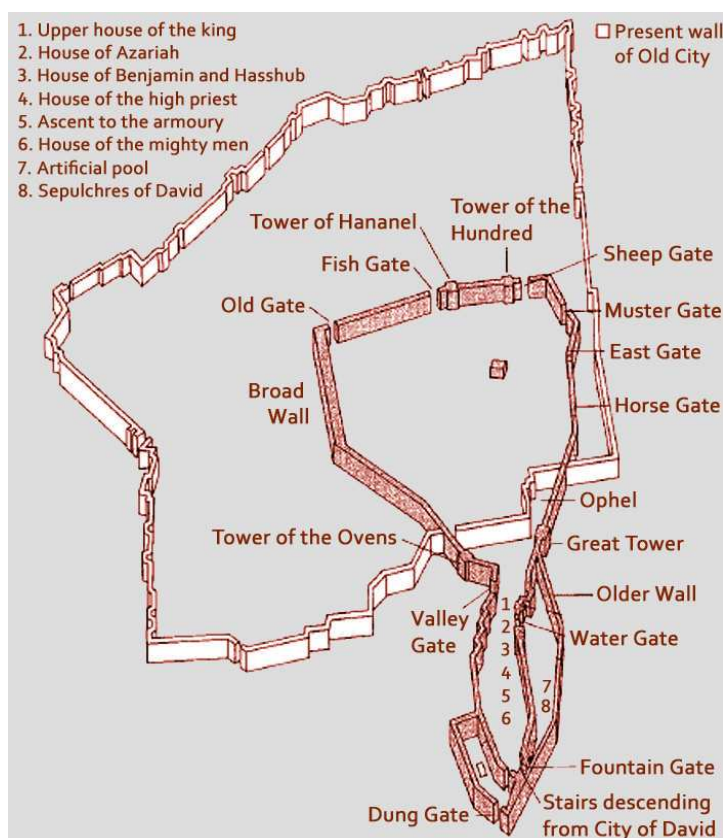
The Project: *Nehemiah 3*

Sheep Gate: *Nehemiah 3:1-2*

The gate was located in the northeast corner of Jerusalem, near the Temple. It received its name because it was the entrance for the sheep set aside for sacrifice. It was the only gate that was sanctified, probably because it involved religious services. We find that Eliashib the High Priest led in the building of this gate. Since he held a prominent position his involvement was an encouragement to others (1 Corinthians 8:9). Several joined in along the wall near the gate, including the priests and men that came from Jericho. This gate was essential for the spiritual well being of the people. With the gate rebuilt it would be easier to conduct their religious ceremonies.

Fish Gate: *Nehemiah 3:3-5*

Next came the fish gate, which was located west of the sheep gate. It was the main entrance for those that transported fish from the north, the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River. Inside the gate, one would find the fish markets. Because of the high volume of traffic from the fish business, other merchants set up shop in the area. The sons of Hassenaah built this gate while others worked on the wall nearby. Special mention is given to the men from Tekoa, a city about nine miles south of Jerusalem.¹ For an unknown reason the Tekoite nobles refused to be part of the work. The sad behavior of the nobles did not hinder the involvement of their men, who worked diligently to rebuild the walls. There will always be some that refuse to work. Let's not be discouraged by this but remain faithful in our service to God (1 Corinthians 15:58). With this gate functional, the city would prosper commercially.



¹John Lange, "Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Nehemiah," (Michigan: Zondervan, 1951) p. 18

Old Gate: *Nehemiah 3:6-12*

It's believed this gate was located on northwestern corner of the city. Being called the 'Old Gate' implies it was one of the oldest gates in the city, perhaps even the first one. It is possible the gate dated back to the time of Melchizedek and Abraham (Genesis 14:18). Nearby was the tower of furnaces, maybe named due to its close proximity to the potteries. Two men, Jehoiada and Meshullam, repaired the gate while others worked on the wall. We read of goldsmiths and apothecaries, those that dealt in spices, perfumes and ointments, joining in the work. Apparently these professionals shut down business to work on the walls, sacrificing their personal gain for God's glory. The Bible also tells us that the daughters of Shallum, co-ruler in Jerusalem, did their part in the work. Evidently women were allowed to get involved. Contrary to modern criticism, the scriptures do not oppress women. Instead we find them being set free like men and encouraged to serve the Lord (Romans 10:13; Philippians 4:3). The gate may have been old but it served a purpose.

Valley Gate: *Nehemiah 3:13*

It was located in the southwest corner of Jerusalem and opened to the Hinnom Valley. The city of Jerusalem was built on a ridge with valleys surrounding it except on the northern side. This was the gate Nehemiah exited through on his inspection of the city. Hanun, along with the people of Zanoah, repaired the gate and walls. Zanoah was about twelve miles west of Jerusalem. The gate was an important entrance for those traveling from the south.

Dung Gate: *Nehemiah 3:14*

This gate was located on the southeast corner of Jerusalem, to the extreme south of the city where it emptied into a deep valley. It was named for its purpose. It was the gate used to remove the garbage and sewage from the city. This would not be the first choice of gates to work on but it was essential for Jerusalem. There is no service too small to God because God is not little. Instead of focusing on the service, we need to focus on the one we serve (1 Corinthians 10:31). Malchiah the co-ruler of the city worked on the gate. Nobody is mentioned concerning the walls. Perhaps they were in good condition. Because of this gate the city remained clean, allowing the people to live separated from filth and garbage.

Fountain Gate: *Nehemiah 3:15-25*

In the southeast corner of Jerusalem we find the Fountain Gate, located near the Enrogel Spring, which may be where the name came from. Inside was the Pool of Siloah, which watered the king's garden. This gate was near several important landmarks. The sepulchers of David; where the late king and others were buried (2 Chronicles 28:27; 1 Kings 2:10; Nehemiah 2:3; Acts 2:29). The pool that was made is probably the pool of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). The artificial pool was made to be a reservoir for the city. Since Jerusalem was not located on water, it had to make some adjustments. The house of the mighty may have been the barracks for David's troops.² An armory, the house of the High Priest, the house of David, and the court of the prison were all located in this area. Shallun the co-ruler of Mizpah worked on the gate and wall with several others. This area was home to many important structures in Jerusalem.

² John Butler, "Nehemiah: The Wall Builder," (Iowa: LBC Publications, 1998) p. 93

Water Gate: *Nehemiah 3:26-27*

The gate was north of the fountain gate near the Gihon Spring, which was an important source of water for Jerusalem. It was vital for the city because without water there is no life. The gate is mentioned, but nothing is said concerning repairs. It is possible the gate was still functional. Nearby was the great tower, which may have been the largest structure on or near the wall. Once again we find the men of Tekoa working on the wall, while their nobles refused to get involved. Yes there will be some that do nothing but praise the Lord for those that go above and beyond like the Tekoites. Since water was transported through this gate it was important for it to be functional. Later, the people would gather before this gate to listen to Ezra read from God's word (Nehemiah 8:1).

Horse Gate: *Nehemiah 3:28*

This gate was located north of the water gate near the area of the Temple. Perhaps the stables were nearby. Israel's king was forbidden to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). Solomon, and others, ignored this command, filling his stables with horses from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28). The horses held in the stables within the city may have been for the army and not the king himself. Either way, horses became a large part of their life. They became a symbol of war because the king and others would ride them into battle. The donkey remained a symbol of peace and was ridden during quiet times. The army may have used this gate when going out to battle.

East Gate: *Nehemiah 3:29*

This gate, on the eastern side of the city, led directly into the Temple. Some have claimed that it was the most magnificent gate of the city. It was the first gate opened in the morning, at daybreak, when it was certain the city was safe. Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah, was the keeper of the east gate. This is the only gate we find with a keeper, one who oversaw the gate and the operations surrounding it. Others worked on the wall near this splendid gate.

Miphkad Gate: *Nehemiah 3:31*

The final gate mentioned was located near the Temple on the northeast side of Jerusalem. It was near the place of the Nethinim and merchants, probably where they conducted business. The name 'Miphkad' means a numbering or an appointed place. It is believed the military gathered here for inspection, both before and after battle, so the gate is also called the Muster or Inspection Gate. Little is said concerning the gate itself but the goldsmiths and merchants worked in the area. This gate represented Israel's ability to protect itself. With the completion of all the gates the city would once again find stability.

Questions for Consideration

What does the people's conduct say about their heart?

What testimony did this group of workers leave behind?

Why do you believe it was important for the city to be rebuilt?

What can we learn from Nehemiah's organization?

Why was it important for the high priest to be involved with the work?

What was the sheep gate used for?

How was the fish gate valuable to the city?

What was unique about the condition of the water gate?

Why was the water gate essential for the city?

What can be learned about work from this chapter?

Points to Ponder

Are you dedicated?

After deciding to build the people immediately began to work. There was no delay or hesitation once the work was commenced. It's important to follow through with commitments. Let's not promise to serve and then fail to show up.

What do your actions show?

Their actions revealed many great characteristics, including dedication, diligence, and courage. It also displayed personal sacrifice and submission to God and the leadership He put in place. Your actions are also revealing, what do they show?

What determines your conduct?

Refuse to let the actions of others determine your conduct. Remain faithful no matter what others do and continue to live for God even if you're the only one. Be strong and ignore those that complain, criticize, or refuse to work.

What's wrong with the old?

Nothing, if it is correct. They rebuilt the Old Gate because it was needed. Today many consider the Bible to be old-fashioned. If it is old, it is because the new generation has not read it. If it is old, it is because it is not longer wanted. If being 'old' is being correct, let's be old.

Are you zealous?

One man, Baruch the son of Zabbai, was noted for his zeal. We are told that this man worked earnestly on the wall. Evidently, his strong desire to rebuild the wall was seen in his effort. It is good to be zealous in God's work.