

Then Eliashib 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 Zaccur the son of Imri built.

The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. Next to them Uzziel 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 Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah 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.

Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, 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. After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, 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 Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz 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 Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh 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 Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. After him Malchijah, 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 3:1–32)

Introduction

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into a left without walls” (Proverbs 25:28). We taught that verse early to our children as a means of instructing them concerning the importance of learning and exercising self-control.

In the ancient world, cities were surrounded by walls as a means of protection from marauding armies and local enemies. At night, the gates were shut and the inhabitants of the city were secure. Well, as secure as they could be. Solomon used this picture to explain that if one does not exercise self-control, then, like a walled city, the enemy can easily rush and do a whole lot of damage.

One of the clearest examples of this is found in the book of Nehemiah. After seventy years of exile, a small group of Jews returned to Jerusalem, driven by aspirations on part of Nehemiah and others for the city to be rebuilt to the glory of God (chapter 2). God providentially intervened and Nehemiah was given leave to go to Jerusalem to begin reconstruction of the city, beginning with reconstruction of the walls.

As he arrived, he spent some time examining the ruins as he made a mental plan how to go about the work of reconstruction. Finally, he called together leading men of the city and told them his plan—but, most importantly, *God's* plan. They were persuaded and collectively committed to rise and build. And so they began.

This brings us to chapter 3, and to the point of this message—specifically for BBC, but I trust as a help toward others, too.

Jerusalem had been through a difficult time. The population of the city had decreased, and as we will see, there were huge gaps left in the wall. This left the city of God open to assaults from the evil one. The walls needed to be repaired, restored, rebuilt. This would require labourers and labour. Thankfully, both were forthcoming. And miraculously, in a mere 52 days, the wall was rebuilt.

BBC has been through a difficult time. Our population of members has decreased in recent times. We have lost some members through discipline, others through shifting to other churches, and several through geographic moves. Many of these were faithful, encouraging, healthy church members. One couple, though still members, are spending Sunday mornings at Grace Baptist Church in Walkerville as we seek to help revitalise that church. In a godly sense, we hope to lose them one day permanently—perhaps taking other members with them.

On top of this, many of us are aware of very serious challenges and painful suffering that our members are facing. Some are so wounded that they are struggling to survive, let alone to serve.

These departures have left, and will leave, gaps in the walls of the ministry of our church. These departures may lead to discouragement for those left behind. But it need not—if we will heed the example of those who stood in the gap in Nehemiah's day.

As I read through Nehemiah in my devotions recently, I was struck particularly by chapter 3, a seemingly mundane chapter in this book.

It is filled with many, many names—some of which are hard to pronounce, and most of which are relative unknowns in the biblical narrative. These are the people who stood in the gap of the wall and did what they could to repair it. As each individual took responsibility for where he laboured (and in many cases, where he lived), in less than two months this massive wall was repaired, restored. The result was the city was then repopulated.

The project was not without its problems and its enemies. Neither was it without its cynics. Further, once the walls were finished, the people of God were not without their problems. But in many ways, that is beside the point. The point is, the covenanted community worked together to the good of their community and, ultimately, to the glory of God.

There is much here for us to consider.

Let's Face Reality

Nehemiah began his journey by facing the reality of a destroyed and vulnerable Jerusalem. He faced this reality honestly and prayerfully—and, therefore, hopefully.

Nehemiah prayed and then acted. We must put feet to our prayers. As has been said, we can do more than pray *after* we have prayed, but we cannot do more than pray *until* we have prayed.

God has promised that he will build his church. He has promised that he will bless faithful gospel efforts. Let us believe these promises and pray hopefully about them—and then move to do what we can to meet the needs around us.

Let's Face Reality With Resolve

Let's rise and build. We need God's perspective, which is to see the nations being made glad (Psalm 67). This will inform and motivate our resolve. Let's have a big view of God, his goal and of his glory. Let's have a big view of God's gospel. This will strengthen our resolve.

Let's Carry Out this Resolve Responsibly—With Our Resources

We, God's people, are the resources—as God's people in Nehemiah's day were the resources God used to repair the walls. We need to assume responsibility to stand in the gap.

In chapter three, many people joined hands in this great and gracious work. And though there was much diversity, the result was unity.

Consider the differences that existed within the workforce. There were people of all ages. We read of fathers and sons working together, and even fathers and daughters (v. 12). The high priest and regular priests worked alongside the laity. People from all walks of life laboured side by side: rulers (vv. 14, 15); goldsmiths (vv. 8, 31, 32); temple servants (v. 26); perfumers (v. 8); and merchants (v. 32). Labourers came from different locales (Jericho, Tekoah, Gibeon, Mizpah, Jerusalem proper, etc.) and comprised people with different tasks and no doubt with varying abilities. Some repaired gates, others repaired doors, others worked on locks, while others no doubt did the brick-and-mortar work. Regardless, these people worked together as a community with a corporate concern.

We read phrases like “next to” (15 times) and “after” or “beside” (15 times). In other words, these members of God's covenanted community were not consumers but contributors. And they were probably too busy on the wall to have time to gripe about others were doing—except those in v. 5, who were too good to serve and, therefore, no doubt, had plenty of time to gripe.

The Work of Reconstruction

Nehemiah 3 is a record of friends working together in reconstruction. Three words appear in this chapter that highlight the commitment of those left behind: “repaired,” “restored,” and “rebuilt.” Together, they occur 41 times. These three verbs drive home one theme: standing in the gap to fix the gaps to the glory of God.

There were breaches in the wall that needed to be sealed. As each did their part, the people of God were protected. As each did their part, the work of reformation—on every level—could take place. As each did their part, the glory of God could be magnified. Work and workers were required, and God provided everyone that was needed.

Let's Fulfil Our Responsibility Despite Resistance

Sadly, there were some who “would not stoop to serve their Lord” (v. 5). Nehemiah faced opposition in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

We should not be naïve: Satan hates the church and he does all at his disposal to discourage, derail, and destroy her. He does not want us to repair, restore, or rebuild. Sanballat and Tobiah (4:1–5; 6:1ff) and the like are still in our neighbourhood. They mock and seek to molest the work of God. Dishonest and threatening letters are still sent with the return address of Satan – letters meant to discourage God’s people and to hinder God’s work (6:5, 17–19).

And yes, troubles from within the people of God, as in Nehemiah’s day (5:1ff), can divert funding and constructive harmony for the work of God. Further, not everyone who should be helping on the wall will do so (3:5).

We need to be alert. We need to pray (6:10–14). And we need to be encouraged that, despite opposition, the wall can be finished (6:15).

But not all the news is bad news. There is a lot of good taking place in our church. There are many encouragements. I recently received the following letter from a church member.

Hi Doug

I want to thank you again for the tough discussion we had [last year about the importance of the church and the need to be a faithful member].

I have done a lot of introspection since then.

Although understanding that church is important in God’s eyes, I did not understand how high that priority is to him, or how the church should look, feel and function.

Submitting to your authority was difficult for me until I understood it in relation to God’s command. I did not realise my disobedience until the introspection that followed our discussion.

I am writing this to you in order to put to rest any burden or concern you and the other elders may have had in this regard about me and by implication my family.

Although I have a deep affection for Psalm 42, I have never been able to associate with v. 4: “These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.”

I have now reached a point in my life where that has changed. I get it now.

Ephesians 3:10 – so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

John 15:12 – This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 17:11 – Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

In short, I am in. I am committed. I am with you, and not against you.

Conclusion

Why was the completion of the wall so important? And why is it so important that we too repair, restore and rebuild?

Because that Jerusalem was to be the dwelling place of God, to the glory of God in all the nations (Psalm 57:5, 9, 11). It was to be the place where all the peoples of the earth, not only Jews, could come and find atonement for their sins that they and their nations could be repaired, restored and rebuilt to the glory of God by their being redeemed by God.

This, of course, never happened. That's because there was coming a better day, a day where the true Temple would come, the Lord Jesus Christ (Haggai 2:1–9).

He would be one who would redeem sinners to the glory of God. He would offer himself as the supreme once-for-all sacrifice for those who turn from their sins trusting him as their Lord and Saviour.

He would then form all who do into the church, the new temple of the living God (Ephesians 2:19–22). This church will then become a people who will become the meeting place of God.

At this meeting place, this temple, others are reached, repairs are constantly being carried out (Ephesians 4:1–10), restoration is ongoing (Ephesians 4:11–15) until one day the walls are completed and perfect (4:16), and a people of God rebuilt to the glory of God.

Church member, this is a vital work we are involved in. For God's sake, stand in the gap!

Christian, if you are not a church member, then become one and use your gifting to fill the gaps.

Non-Christian, you need to be reconciled before you can ever be restored, before you can ever be involved in the greatest work on earth: the building of the church of the living God. This will happen, not by your own efforts, but by the atoning/reconciling work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent and believe. Then you can belong, and you can heed the call to rise up and build.

Stand in the Gap

Nehemiah 3:1–32

Doug Van Meter

AMEN