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Repairing the Northern, Western and Southern Walls
Nehemiah 3: 1-14

Repairing the Northern, Western and Southern Walls DIG: What was the people's response to Nehemiah's challenge? How many professional groups or classes of the Jewish community participated in Nehemiah's winning team? What, if any, distinctions between clergy and laity do you see? Have people in the group pick one or two of the gates and give a 30-second progress report to the group. Decide among yourselves: Who had the most interesting report to share? Why do you think so? What's interesting about Eliashib and his fellow priests? About Shallum's daughters? Why do you think the nobles of Tekoa refused to work? What did that mean for the men of Tekoa (see 3:5 and 27)? What do you learn from the fact that Nehemiah knew who worked "next to" whom? What does this tell you about the organization and cooperation involved in this nation-wide effort? How much of the wall was repaired during this time (3:12)?

REFLECT: What attitudes and actions from Nehemiah's team of wall-builders fit believers who want to build the Church? Which ones should believers avoid? Which one do you think is primary to all the others? Which one could you demonstrate at home? At school? At work? At your messianic synagogue? At church? Do you know anyone like the nobles from Tekoa who want the benefits of a project without having to work for it? From Nehemiah, what do you learn about how to deal with them? When you face a big task, what helps you accomplish it?

445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**).
Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah memoirs (see **Ac – Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Nehemiah Memoirs**).

Earlier, **Nehemiah told the people "how the good hand of my God was on me and the words that the king had said to me" (Nehemiah 2:8). Then they replied, "Let us begin building." Nehemiah** came to **the people** with compassion, realism, conviction, and faith; as a result, **ADONAI** used **Him** to communicate **his** own vision and motivate **the people**. **So, they prepared themselves for this good work (Nehemiah 2:18). In the seventh example of leadership in the life of Nehemiah, effective leaders motivate people to action** (**to see link click Bt – The Third Return**).

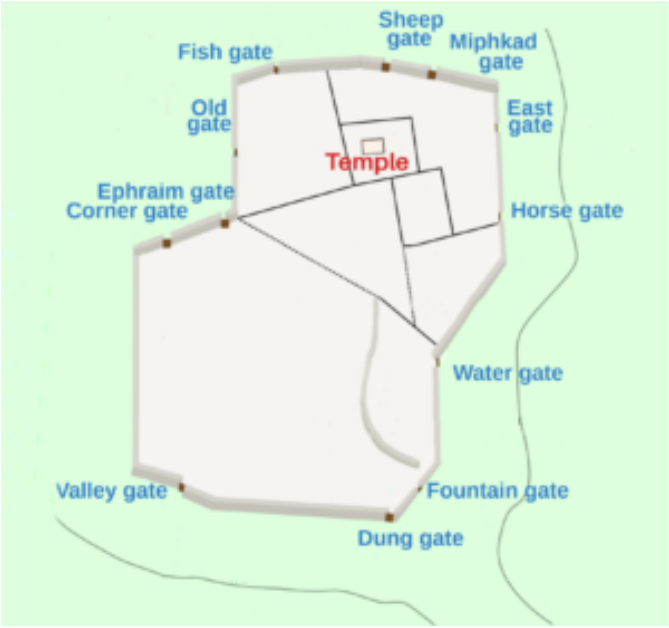
Nehemiah faced a great challenge and had great faith in **ADONAI**, but **he** would have accomplished very little had there not been great dedication on the part of **the people** who helped **him** rebuild **the wall**. With the kind of humility that befits a godly leader, **Nehemiah** gave all the credit to **the people** when **he** wrote: **So we rebuilt the wall . . . for the people had a heart to work (Nehemiah 4:6).**

It was important that **Nehemiah** started **his** list with **Eliashib the high priest**. The most important person is named first. **Nehemiah** wanted to show that **he** received the cooperation of **the high priest**, and thus, also that of **the** other **priests**.[226] **Then, on the north wall, Eliashib the cohen gadol and his brothers, the cohanim, arose and built the Sheep Gate (John 5:2).** According to **Nehemiah 12:10 he** was **the son of Joiakim** and **grandson of Jeshua**, the contemporary of **Zerubbabel** mentioned in **Ezra 3:2. Eliashib** was the grandson of **Jeshua (Ezra 5:2)**, **the high priest** when **the Temple** was finally rebuilt (see **Ay – Haggai: The Strait Talker**). **The priests**, even **the high priest**, did not just direct others, but **they themselves arose and built the Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:1a). It was probably named that because the sacrificial sheep that were brought into the City passed through that gate, situated on the north-east side of the Temple. The priests, therefore, had a personal interest in its restoration.**

There were two towers on the north wall since this was the only side not naturally defended by a steep hill. **They dedicated the wall** running from **the gate** to **the Tower, and set up its doors, dedicating it as far as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of Hananel,** which was probably the same as **the fortress adjacent to the Temple (Nehemiah 2:8a). It was situated half-way between the Sheep Gate and the Fish Gate (Jeremiah 31:37; Zechariah 14:10). Altogether ten gates are mentioned (Nehemiah 3:1, 3, 6, 13-15, 26, 28-29, 31), but this gate had a special dedication ceremony because the priests ministered through it (Nehemiah 3:1b).** When **the**

people finished the whole wall, **they** had a **dedication** ceremony. This is the only section where a separate **dedication** ceremony is mentioned. Most likely, it was **the high priest's dedication** of the whole project and it shows its religious significance. **The walls**, it can be argued, were regarded as an extension of **the House of God**.[227]

This was a cooperative effort. **The men of Jericho, were assigned work on the part of the wall nearest to their city, built next to it and Zaccur the son of Imri built next to Eliashib's priestly** party of builders **(Nehemiah 3:2). People** from all professions and trades helped, coming from many villages and outlying areas of **Judah**.



Then the building turned westward. The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate, which was one of **Jerusalem's** main entrances **(Second Chronicles 33:14). It was in the northwest corner of the wall, near the merchant quarter of the city where the modern Damascus Gate stands. The name may be due to its proximity to the fish market where the fishermen from Tyre sold their goods.** It was probably also called **the Ephraim Gate (8:16, 12:39; Second Kings 14:13),** and **the Middle Gate (Jeremiah 39:3). They laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars (Nehemiah 3:3).**

Next to them Meremoth (Hebrew: *to make firm or strong*) **son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz made repairs. Adjacent to them Meshullam son of Berechiah, son**

of Meshezabel made repairs, and next to them Zadok son of Baana made repairs. The men of Tekoa made repairs next to them. Tekoa was located southeast of Beth-Lechem, and was the home of the prophet **Amos**. **The Tekoites** are mentioned twice in the chapter, building two different sections of **the wall (Nehemiah 3:5** and **27)**, and were, therefore, more than willing to work and do more than **their** fair share. But **their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their masters (Nehemiah 3:4-5). The Tekoite nobles** were among those who had been in **the Land** before **the exiles** had returned, and the sudden influence and power given to **the returnees**, particularly **Nehemiah**, were bound to be a cause for concern, even resentment. The location of **Tekoa**, southeast of Beth-Lechem, suggests the influence of **Geshem the Arab (Nehemiah 2:19)**, who perhaps led a local spirit of resentment among **the community**. "Who does **Nehemiah** think **he** is?" would have been the predominant question in **Tekoa**, and the nobles, in contrast to the rest of the community, thought it beneath them to engage in menial work of that nature under the leadership of a Persian official, even if **he** did have a good **Jewish** pedigree.[228]

Joiada son of Paseah, and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. This gate stood on the north-west side of the City, and was identical with the Corner Gate (Second Kings 14:13). It has been suggested that the name came from its having been the entrance to the Old City. They laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts and its bars (Nehemiah 3:6).

Adjacent to them worked Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, men from Gibeon and Mizpah (or lookout point) **who are under the jurisdiction of the governor of Trans-Euphrates (Nehemiah 3:7).** It is clear from the whole chapter that **the Chronicler** wanted to refer to certain sections of **the wall** that were restored. The men of **Gibeon** and **Mizpah** did restoration as far as the residence of **the governor**. It is interesting to note that **the governor of Trans-Euphrates** had a residence in **Jerusalem**. This would mean that **he** used the residence while visiting **Judah**, one of **his** minor provinces.[229]

Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, worked adjacent to him, and Hananiah, one of the perfumers, worked next to him. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. It was a point of great strategic importance and therefore thicker and stronger than the rest of the wall (Nehemiah 3:8). Social organizations also must have contributed to the building project by working at their trade.

Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem made repairs next to them (Nehemiah 3:9). Yerushalayim was divided into two districts, each governed by a ruler (see verse 12 for the other). The division must have taken place during the monarchy for purposes of administration (Second Kings 12:14; Zephaniah 1:10).

Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired the section adjacent to them opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah worked next to them. The first **section** had been **restored** and **they** were working on the second. Naturally, those with homes near the wall would have been more enthusiastic about making **repairs** in that area (also see **3:23, 28-30**). **Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Furnaces** for baking bread or for firing bricks **(Nehemiah 3:10-11).**



Shallum son of Hallohesh, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, and his daughters repaired the next section (Nehemiah 3:12). That brief mention of these **women** otherwise unnamed in Scripture intrigues me. How exactly did **Shallum's daughters** help rebuild **the wall**? Were these **women** wealthy heiresses or widows who helped **their father** finance **his** part of the rebuilding efforts? Did **they** provide food and drink for the workers, or did **they** actually clear rubble, spread mortar, and carry stones with **their** own hands? We don't know for sure. But however **they** helped, **Shallum's daughters** made a significant enough contribution to the rebuilding effort that **Nehemiah** included **them** in **his** list of the builders—the only **women** so named.

By helping rebuild **the wall**, **Shallum's daughters** took part in ensuring **Jerusalem's** security. **Walls** were a city's first line of defense in the ancient world. **Walls** helped city leaders control access to the city and protected the city from attack. Without **walls** cities were vulnerable to attacks from bandits, wild animals, and enemy armies. With **a wall** and a good source of water, cities could withstand a

siege and repulse enemy forces. Living in an unwalled city made its residents vulnerable and insecure.

But rebuilding **Jerusalem's wall** was not an easy proposition. The tasks of clearing rubble, gathering supplies, and rebuilding **the gates** the Babylonians had burned with fire had to be completed by a people struggling to survive in the land they had once called home. Furthermore, **Jerusalem's** rebuilding efforts did not go unopposed. Rebuilding **Jerusalem** caused a realignment in the political power structures in the region, and some of the neighboring provincial governors were displeased. They attempted to sabotage the rebuilding efforts, causing **Nehemiah** to order the workers to build with a sword in one hand and to carry their materials with the other. Despite the challenges, **Shallum's daughters** found a way to participate in rebuilding **the wall** and ensuring the security of **their** home.

Shallum's daughters remind me that the portraits of biblical women are more diverse than we might sometimes think. There are those like **Martha** who find joy in serving and those like **Lydia** who joyfully use **their** homes as a base for ministry. But there are also **women** like **Deborah**, **Miriam**, **Huldah**, **Jochebed**, **Rahab**, and **Shallum's daughters – women** who use all the creativity, courage, and resources at **their** disposal to stand for justice, protect **their** homes, and do the work that needs to be done.

Shallum's daughters saw that **Jerusalem** was in danger, and **they** determined to do something about it. **Their father** was a leader in **Jerusalem**, and it would have been easy for **Shallum's daughters** to refrain from a task that was traditionally done by men. But **Shallum's daughters** were not content to leave **their** home in peril. **They** committed **themselves** and **their** resources to rebuild **the wall**, helping ensure security for **themselves**, **their family**, and **their** home.

Shallum's daughters remind me that never having done it before isn't a reason not to try. We don't have to meet every need we see, but sometimes our awareness of a need is **God** calling us to action. What **walls** do you see that need rebuilding? Where is there brokenness in your family or community that needs to be healed? Do you see defenseless people who need a protector? Is there a threat you can stand against? Wherever **God** calls you to serve, do it with all your might. Join **Shallum's daughters** in rebuilding your section of **the wall**.

On the south wall, **Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah**, about thirteen miles southwest of **Jerusalem**, **repaired the Valley Gate. They built it and set**

up its doors, its bolts, and its bars. They also repaired a thousand cubits, more than a third of a mile, of wall up to the Dung Gate (Nehemiah 3:13). Considering the length, it may be that this section had little damage from the Babylonians when they destroyed the City on Tisha B'Av 586 BC, and therefore, required little repair.

Malchijah son of Rechab (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Dt – The House of the Rechabites**) **repaired the Dung Gate. He built it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars (Nehemiah 3:14). He** was **the ruler of the district of Beth-Cherem,** or **House of the Vineyard** which is mentioned in **Jeremiah** as a **signal** point: **Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! This is a cone-shaped hill between Beit-Lechem and Tekoa, named for its military purposes during the Crusades, a very suitable spot to raise a signal. For disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction (Jeremiah 6:1b).**