

Nehemiah: A Righteous Governor to Jerusalem and Example to All

A Study of the Book of Nehemiah: Nehemiah 3 & 4¹

Nehemiah 3

Introduction for Nehemiah 3

Israel is a nation of remembrance... even today there are pockmarks from bullets that have struck the old city gates and walls, and there are disabled military vehicles peppering the countryside, reminding the people of the pain, sacrifice, and enduring nature of their success in surviving as a people and nation. There are also the sounds of sonic booms from the fighter jets overhead continuing to assure the nation's strength, and these same jets tip their wings as they fly over Masada, the place of the Jews' last great stand against the Romans in the first century when their beloved city again suffered destruction. Locations throughout Israel, and most poignantly the city of Jerusalem with its walls, gates, towers, and pools, carry the weight of history – of the mingling of joy and sorrow that accompany victories and defeats. The beloved city as a whole has in its own right served as an enduring "Ebenezer"² – this is true today and it was true of Nehemiah's time too. The Jews, as the covenant people of God, were restoring more than just an important city. Nehemiah and the people were restoring the dignity of the people of promise, were providing proper protection of the rebuilt Temple, and were laying the foundation for greater restoration. Nehemiah understood this and it would serve us well to appreciate the recorded labor in chapter three with these things in mind.

Without exhaustively reviewing the sweep of Jerusalem's history in the Old Testament Scriptures, consider the following chapters as you prepare to engage Nehemiah chapter three. I am certain that these and numerous other details filled the people's hearts and minds as they labored in picking up stones, spreading mortar, and laying beams.

When King David took Jerusalem for his Capital City.

"At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, 'You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off'—thinking, 'David cannot come in here.' Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. And David said on that day, 'Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack 'the lame and the blind,' who are hated by David's soul.' Therefore it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.' And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward." 2 Samuel 5:5-9

Remember the story, from the triumph of the great King David taking the city for Israel to the heartbreaking flight and defeat of King Zedekiah while Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians.

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² Ebenezers were raised as place of memorial or testimonies of remembrance to God's enduring faithfulness.

Jerusalem's Fall to Babylon

“And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, and the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem.”
2 Kings 25:1-10

The acute pain of separation from the beloved city, Jerusalem, while in captivity.

“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!
Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!
Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said,
'Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!'
O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us!
Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”
Psalm 137

The Rebuilding of the Temple as recorded in Ezra 3-6 and Haggai.

“And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord, according to the directions of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.' And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away.” Ezra 3:10-13

There was a complexity of thoughts and emotions that would have accompanied this work, but at its heart was that this was God's work and it would be accomplished by his people.

"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.' And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' So they strengthened their hands for the good work." Nehemiah 2:17-18

The Detailed Work of the Walls

Nehemiah three has all those details... places you have likely never been to and that most will never see in person in this natural life and people that do not constitute the great heroes of the faith and history. But these places are of extraordinary consequence and these people, while in many ways are long forgotten, have been secured in the sacred Scriptures that we affirm are in their details and entirety both inspired and provided for our benefit (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Nehemiah three is not simply a textual place holder to help advance the narrative or a personal record for a course on Jerusalem's history. It consists of detail-rich truth and should be treated accordingly. Further, I would encourage you to approach these details with the appreciation of those who first heard them. These places, as they are referenced, would immediately populate the mind and affections with remembrance. It would produce similar responses to someone laying out the details of the neighborhood and city where you grew up – highlighting landmarks well known and cherished to those who knew such places as home. So, do the hard work now of valuing these details and commit to progress in your labors as robust Bible students so that each like encounter with details of the Scriptures populate the mind with other passages, with maps, and with images that you might better understand and appreciate their beauty.

As you begin your engagement of chapter three it needs to be understood that this is a chapter that gives its attention to the work of repairing, restoration and rebuilding. These are major elements of the book as a whole, but of the forty-two times that the word translated "repair/restore" was used in the book, chapter three references it thirty-five times, or eighty-three percent of its references in the book.

3:1-2 Sheep Gate and Walls

As the accounting of the repairs are addressed it becomes clear that the entire circuit of the wall was accounted for and that it was referenced in order by way of a counterclockwise pattern. So we should note that, as all areas would systematically be covered, one gate would both begin and end the record of this work, namely the Sheep Gate in immediate proximity to the Temple.

Nehemiah was likely providing a natural emphasis that this wall building work was a work that God had placed on his heart for his people to accomplish, and the Temple was the most immediate and tangible connection of The LORD to this city, Jerusalem. Further, it was a work that, while having a broad range of diverse persons working on it, would first be identified with the high priest and the other priests who upon completing this first area would consecrate it – set it apart to God as holy.

Throughout the chapter numerous people are personally identified and the first such person was the high priest Eliashib who was the grandson of Jeshua, the leader when the Temple was being rebuilt.³ Accompanying him in the work were the priests who worked to restore the Sheep Gate and portions of the wall.

In describing the work that was being completed there is also a reference to the two towers so as to provide a range of the area covered by these men, the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel. There was no reference to who rebuilt the towers so it is presumed that they were either already restored at this time or that they were in sufficient condition. The two towers were consequential for the city as they were postured in a defensively strategic location on the northernmost side of the city where there were less natural/topographical protections.⁴

Following this first report of who was working and the scope of their repairs we see that a pattern begins of one person and/or groups working alongside the ones just as mentioned. This continues through the duration of the chapter as the circuit of the wall continued to be recorded.

Next to the priests, the men of Jericho built. These were men who had come from Jericho, northeast of Jerusalem and bordering the Jordan River. They were the first of several groups of persons identified that came from the surrounding areas of Judah to participate in the restoration of Jerusalem and its walls. This was a work being accomplished by the Jews and not just the people in the immediate proximity of Jerusalem. Please see page 15 for an overview of regions and cities that had persons participating in this unique work.

Next to the men of Jericho a single man is mentioned, Zaccur the son Imri. Like several other individuals named it was not always completely clear if he was the head of his father's house and possibly served as a representative for others present or if he was singularly working in this area. Additional details are sometimes provided or able to be deducted from other passages for other singularly mentioned persons and they are noted accordingly.

Sidebar: A Diversity of Workers

People were coming from no less than eight districts, cities, and territories outside of Jerusalem proper. People from a variety of vocations and places in life: the high priest, priests, Levites, various levels of governing officials (from regions, to cities, to partial territories), a perfumer, goldsmiths, a gatekeeper, merchants and even daughters.

3:3-5 Fish Gate and Walls

The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate, and while not all were necessarily present at this worksite, it appears that this company may have been up to 3,930 strong (Nehemiah 7:38). The men laid its beams, set its doors, bolts, and bars.

Next to the sons of Hassenaah was Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz who was repairing the walls in this area. It appears that Meremoth son of Uriah was also a priest⁵ and that he was one of the signees of the covenant of obedience that the people bound themselves to in Nehemiah 10 (10:5).

³ The New American Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Mervin Breneman; Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993 (Hereafter: Breneman), Pg.186

⁴ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.662

⁵ Ezra 8:33 and Nehemiah 10:5,12:3

Meremoth is later recorded as personally repairing another section of the wall (Nehemiah 3:21) and is the first of the persons so identified as serving in more than one capacity on this project.

Regarding the matter of working more than one area, Derek Kidner points out that there were two explicit records of persons doing double-duty as it were, but the language of the text lends itself to multiple persons doing double-duty, but only one of their efforts is directly referenced. From this it appears to affirm the conclusion that the list here was not completely exhaustive so as to include all the works and possibly not all the persons. Though it clearly communicates the sweep both of the work and persons involved.⁶

Next to them Meshullam son of Berchiah son of Meshezabel repaired portions of the wall. Again, while it is not wholly clear why he was singled out it appears that perhaps he had others under him because in Ezra 8:16 there is reference to a Meshullam who was among the leading men. But this could have been another Meshullam as at least one other is referenced in Ezra.

Like Meremoth, he too is referenced later (3:30) as working on another area of the wall.

Unfortunately, there were too many Meshullams to have clarity on the various references throughout the book. It appears that Meshullam was among the few men who stood with Ezra as he read and expounded the Law of Moses (8:4), but which one is not clear.

Two Meshullams are referenced as being signees of the covenant of obedience in chapter 10, but neither have their father's name provided. One is in the list of the priests and the other is listed among the chiefs of the people.

Two Meshullams are again referenced in Nehemiah 12 and they both appear to be priests and heads of their respective father's households.

He is possibly identified as a gatekeeper who stood guard over the storehouses of the gates (12:25), and he is possibly identified as a participant in the assembled choirs on the wall (12:33); but neither is clear because of the duplication of this name.

Next to them Zadok son of Baana repaired portions of the wall. Further is not known of him - if he was not a head of his father's house then it is possible he was working alone.

Next to them the Tekoites repaired and an unfortunate detail was included here - that their nobles would not stoop or lower themselves to serve their Lord. The Tekoites were Jews living in or around Tekoa that had come to see the work to completion.

There appears to be a clear expression of shame regarding these nobles' conduct - it was obvious that everyone should have been helping and that no one was above this laborious, but necessary work. However, for clarity the general conclusion was that because of Tekoa's location and Geshem's powerful influence in close proximity to them - this could have been a contributing factor to the leaderships' choices here.⁷

⁶ Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Ezra and Nehemiah, Derek Kidner, Intersity Press, 2009 (Hereafter: Kidner), Pg.97, Footnote 21

⁷ The Old Testament Library: Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition, 1988 (Hereafter: Blenkinsopp), Pg.234

3:6-12 Yeshanah Gate and Walls

Two were personally named in repairing the Yeshanah Gate: Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah.

There are four additional references to a Joidada in Nehemiah and one is identified as having a different father and the others lack necessary context to distinguish between these two.

Meshullam may have been the man referenced in Ezra 8:16 as one of the leading men (no reference to his father or other contextual clues), but as observed in the prior section (3:4) there was already another Meshullam referenced in this immediate context - different man. Several references to one or both of these Meshullams are observed throughout the book of Nehemiah - these were referenced with the first Meshullam above.

Again, note what may be able to be deducted from the two Meshullams referenced in the same context:

Two Meshullams are referenced as being signees of the covenant of obedience in chapter 10, but neither have their father's name provided. One is in the list of the priests and the other is listed among the chiefs of the people.

Two Meshullams are again referenced in Nehemiah 12 and they both appear to be priest and heads of their respective father's households.

Regarding the gate, like the description for the building of the Fish Gate the work on the Yeshahah Gate was described: laid its beams, set its doors, bolts, and bars.

Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon son of Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah repaired the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River.

It is curious that Melatiah was singled out as a Gibeonite when it then states that the men of Gibeon were laboring here - no further mention is made of him so it is presumed that he was in some form of leadership among the Gibeonites and was working to see that the rebuild was successful.

Note that the Gibeonites were not Israelites, but protectively dwelt among them and are a reflection of the complexity of the nations and the nuanced elements of God's redemptive work among and through Israel.

Sidebar: The Gibeonites

To understand the history of this people, see the deception that occurred at the conquest in Joshua 9 and then Joshua and Israel's faithful defense of them in Joshua 10.

See also the great offense that The LORD took to King Saul's killing them - violating Israel's covenant with them - this offense brought judgment until their blood was recompensed under David in 2 Samuel 21.

Similar to Melatiah being singled out as a Gibeonite, so also is Jadon singled out as a Meronothite without further information about him or his family. However, unlike the Gibeonites, I was not able to discover anything overtly stated about the Meronothites in the Scriptures beyond this reference.

The men of Gibeon and the men of Mizpah were contributing to the work. Gibeon was approximately 6 miles northwest of Jerusalem.⁸

Mizpah was also a well referenced city in Israel's history and was approximately 7.5 miles north of Jerusalem.⁹

The attention of their work was the governor's seat – not necessarily where this higher-level officer would operate his administration, but a place of occupation when in the area.

Beyond the River was a way to refer to the opposite side of the Euphrates River - a clear and substantial demarcation for the region and the Persian Empire in particular at this time.

Next to them Uzziel son of Harhaiah repaired portions of the wall. Uzziel was specifically identified as having the skill of working with gold and here he was faithfully participating in what was effectively raw construction – working to see the restoration be successful (quite the opposite end of the spectrum of his identified work).

Uzziel was only identified by his father (not further referenced) and his work.

Next to him Hananiah made repairs, but here the work is identified as restoring Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Hananiah was identified as one of the perfumers.

Hananiah son of Shelemiah is referenced shortly after this in reference to another area being repaired in 3:30, but it is not wholly clear if this is the same man. Also, a Hananiah was referenced later as being the governor of the castle in Jerusalem in 7:2, though it is highly improbable that this is the same man as he was referenced to here as a perfumer and not a high-ranking official/administrator.

Which of these Hananiahs later signed the covenant of obedience in chapter ten is not known.

Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur repaired portions of the wall. Rephaiah was identified as ruler of half the district of Jerusalem which likely included more than the city proper. Also, while it was not explicitly stated, it appears that people under him may have been participating in this repair work alongside him as the plural was used referencing back to him in advancing to the next workers, "next to *them*."

Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph repaired portions of the wall opposite his house. No further information is available for Jedaiah, but it would appear that he had a house within the city as he was recorded to be repairing opposite of his house.

Next to them Hattush son of Hashabneiah repaired portions of the wall. Hattush appears to be one of the signees of the covenant of obedience in chapter 10, but his father's name is not provided in that chapter. Hattush was also identified as a priest and a chief among his brothers in Nehemiah 12:2.

Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired portions of the wall and the Tower of the Ovens.

It appears that Malchijah son of Harim was among the guilty men of Israel who married foreign women - see Ezra 10:31.

⁸ Zondervan Atlas of the Bible, Revised Edition, Carl G. Rasmussen, Zondervan, 2010 (Hereafter Rasmussen), Pg.234

⁹ Rasmussen, Pg.172

Here in chapter three there are two if not three different men named Malchijah so it is not clear who was being referenced to in subsequent chapters if no reference to a father was provided.

Hasshub may be referenced to again later in the chapter (some others are plainly duplicated), but it is not wholly certain. Further, this may be the same Hasshub who also signed the covenant of obedience in chapter ten.

Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh and his daughters repaired portions of the wall. Like Rephaiah, Shallum is identified as ruler of half the district of Jerusalem.

It is a unique and somewhat curious detail that it is stated that the workers accompanying him were his daughters and regarding this matter there was plenty of debate among commentators as to whether or not these were literally a man's daughters or cities/villages under his authority. It appears most consistent to conclude that they were indeed his actual daughters and Blenkinsopp articulates this accordingly, "Shallum's daughters should not be disposed of by textual surgery. Either he had no sons or his daughters distinguished themselves by volunteering. In any case, their presence in the work detail was considered noteworthy."¹⁰

3:13-14 Valley Gate and Walls to the Dung Gate

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. The work on the Valley Gate was described: set its doors, bolts, and bars.

Hanun and Zanoah also were stated to have repaired a thousand cubits of the wall (approximately 1,500 feet) as far as the next gate, the Dung Gate.

Sidebar: 1,500 Feet, How?

Keil & Delitzsch reasonably argue that the destruction of Jerusalem and its walls does not require that every portion of every wall was absolutely and completely leveled to the ground, but that a comprehensive destruction of the walls and their leveling in the majority of locations would have made their functionality void. Therefore, it is further argued, that there were likely portions not needing repair or at the least not needing comprehensive repair which is why some of the workers were credited with repairing substantial portions, as we see here, and others much smaller areas. This is further supported by the apparent remaining towers that are still standing – fixtures that would have been consequential in the defense of the city when the full unit stood, but were of little to no consequence in their present context.¹¹ By way of contrast the area that was so devastated that Nehemiah could not pass by it on his scouting mission was also the area that King Zedekiah fled through when fleeing the city and an area that would likely have suffered total destruction as a result.¹²

It appears that Hanun participates in helping repair another portion of the wall too (3:30).

Zanoah was approximately 14.5 miles southwest of Jerusalem.¹³

It is unclear if Hanun was possibly a leader from Zanoah and that is why he was personally mentioned along with them.

¹⁰ Blenkinsopp, Pg.236

¹¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 4 – Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.124

¹² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.124

¹³ Rasmussen, Pg. 302

The Valley Gate was the place from which Nehemiah initiated his scouting mission when first arriving in Jerusalem.

Malchijah son of Rechab repaired the Dung Gate.

Malchijah is identified as the ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem. However, on account of other persons named Malchijah it is unclear who is referenced at different times when no family name/information is provided. See also Malchijah in 3:11. This Malchijah was referenced to as the ruler of the district of Beth-haccerem. Further, it is unclear if this would imply that others under him would have been helping, but it appears that he worked alone on this... "he rebuilt it..."

The work on the Dung Gate was described: rebuilt the gate and set its doors, bolts, and bars.

3:15-32 Fountain Gate, Proximity to other Gates, Walls, and Structures

Shallum son of Col-hozeh repaired the Fountain Gate.

Shallum was identified as the ruler of the district of Mizpah.

Already the men of Mizpah are stated to have been helping in rebuilding the seat of the governor (3:7).

Shallum was identified as the ruler of the district of Mizpah and later Ezer is stated to be the ruler of Mizpah (3:19), which was the city, whereas Shallum is overseeing the larger district that included the city.

It appears that Shallum did this work himself, but it may have been a way to particularly emphasize his participation with the implicit understanding that others were assisting.

The work on the Fountain Gate was described: rebuilt and covered it, as well as set its doors, bolts, and bars.

In addition to the repair of the Fountain Gate Shallum was specifically stated to have rebuilt the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden as far as the stairs that went down from the city of David.

It appears that the Pool of Shelah was what Nehemiah referred to as the King's Pool when he was on his scouting mission in 2:14. The Pool of Shelah is also known as the Pool of Siloam whose water supply came from the redirected Gihon Springs by way of Hezekiah's tunnel.¹⁴

Hezekiah's Tunnel

As a proactive defensive measure Hezekiah redirected a major water source into the city of Jerusalem by way of a magnificent tunnel cut underground. "Springs in the vicinity of the city were stopped up, and a 1,750-foot-long water tunnel was dug through the solid rock in order to direct water from the Gihon Spring, located outside Jerusalem on the east, to a pool located within the city walls."¹⁵

¹⁴ Nehemiah 3, Net Note 17

¹⁵ Rasmussen, Pg.167

The account is recorded in 2 Chronicles.

"And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, he planned with his officers and his mighty men to stop the water of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, 'Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?' He set to work resolutely and built up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers upon it, and outside it he built another wall, and he strengthened the Millo in the city of David. He also made weapons and shields in abundance. And he set combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.' And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah." 2 Chronicles 32:2-8

This was also the area that King Zedekiah fled from when Babylon successfully penetrated Jerusalem (Jeremiah 39:1-4) and the area that was so bad that Nehemiah could not advance around it and continue his circuit of examining the walls. "...there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass."¹⁶

"The City of David" was a portion of Jerusalem (on the southeast side).

One could imagine at this time that the history and heritage of Jerusalem would have been flooding the hearts and minds of the people while restoring this area, the pool at the king's garden, and the areas of the City of David would have brought to mind that this was Israel's royal capital in addition to being their spiritual capital.

The account continues, Nehemiah son of Azbuk 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. Nehemiah son of Azbuk was identified as ruler of half the district of Beth-zur (on the southern edge of Judah, southwest of Tekoa).

Note that Nehemiah son of Azbuk repaired opposite the tombs of David, King David, and that in Nehemiah son of Hacaliah's petition to King Artaxerxes it was the city of his father's tombs that was desolate. However, these are the only tombs directly spoken of in the remainder of the book. Obviously there were other tombs in Jerusalem and Nehemiah had his own father's house in mind (perhaps others too), but this again punctuates the nature of his beloved city - it is not only his hometown, but also where the great kings of Israel were laid to rest.

Regarding the house of the mighty men – while there are numerous references to "mighty men" in the Scriptures the consistent pattern appears to be renowned soldiers, effectively the counterpart to our contemporary elite special forces. The most famous of these groups were King David's Mighty Men¹⁷ and it is most likely their reputation for which this house was named and possibly originally occupied. An element that once again draws on the glory of this city under restoration.

Next, the Levites repaired portions of the wall under the leadership of Rehum son of Bani.

¹⁶ Nehemiah 2:14

¹⁷ See 2 Samuel 23:8-39

It appears that Rehum was identified as among the chiefs of the people and a signee of the covenant of obedience (10:25). Rehum may also have been a Levite and even a priest (12:3).

Next to him Hashabiah repaired for his district of Keilah where he was ruler of half of the district. Hashabiah was possibly a Levite too (10:11,12:24).

Keilah was approximately 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem.¹⁸

It appears that Hashabiah either worked alone or led his repair team as he was given credit for repairing for his district.

After Hashabiah their brothers repaired, Bavvai son of Henadad repaired portions of the wall. Bavvai appears to be Hashabiah's counterpart as the ruler of the other half of Keilah.

Next to him Ezer son of Jeshua repaired portions of the wall opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. Ezer was the ruler of Mizpah, not to be confused with Shallum, who was the ruler of the district of Mizpah; rather, Ezer appeared to rule the city proper not the region.

Baruch son of Zabbai repaired from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib, the high priest.

There may be a second Baruch referenced in chapter eleven, but it is possible that he is the Baruch that signed the covenant of obedience in chapter ten. Baruch's work appears to be directly connected to Ezer's work and continues to Eliashib's house.

The high priest had a residence in the city and in close proximity to the wall - apparently it was among the completed structures. This would have been reasonable for the active dynamics of Temple worship and his corresponding responsibilities.

After him Meremoth son Uriah son of Hakkoz repaired from Eliashib's door to the end of his house. Meremoth is identified by two preceding generations rather than just one – see above where he was originally addressed for further.

Meremoth repaired a precise/limited area, but obviously contributed and it further confirms Eliashib's residence being on/at the wall and prior to this a vulnerable residence.

Eliashib and his residence secure a reasonable amount of attention.

The priests were also participating in the repair work of the city.

Benjamin and Hasshub repaired portions of the wall opposite of their house.

No further information is known/provided for Benjamin.

This may be the same Hasshub who previously repaired another portion of the wall as well as the Tower of the Ovens (3:11) – see prior section for further.

Azariah son of Maseiah son of Ananiah repaired portions of the wall beside his house. Azariah is identified by two preceding generations rather than just one and he may have been one of the men who explained/exposited the Law for the people listening to Ezra read aloud (8:7). Further, it appears that Azariah may have been a priest and among those who signed the covenant of obedience (10:2).

¹⁸ Rasmussen, Pg.289

Binnui son of Henadad repaired from the house of Azariah to the buttress and the corner and appears to be a Levite and one who signed the covenant of obedience (10:9,12:8).

Palal son Uzai repaired portions of the wall opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard.

It sounds like this would have been the area of the official royal residence, again reminding all that this was the city of the king and his dwelling place.

Pedaiah son of Parosh and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and on the projecting tower.

It appears that Pedaiah was standing with Ezra as he publically declared the Scriptures to the people (8:4) and that he was a Levite (13:13).

The area of the temple servants located between the City of David and the Temple Mount was known as "Ophel."

"It is possible that this royal acropolis, built at least in part on earth-and-stone fill north of the City of David but south of the temple complex, at the narrow neck of the ridge that connected the two areas, was in early times called the Millo (NIV "supporting terraces"; 1 Kings 9:15, 24; 11:27) but later came to be known as the Ophel (the acropolis)."¹⁹

Tekoites repaired a section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel. The Tekoites, who had also worked on another portion of the wall (3:5), are also laboring here too.

The priests repaired above the Horse Gate - opposite their own houses which were in close proximity to the Temple.

After them Zadok son of Immer repaired opposite his own house.

There are other references to Zadok, but without identification of his father it is unknown which Zadok is intended.

After him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah repaired portions of the wall and was identified as the keeper of the East Gate.

Various Shemaiah's are referenced in the book and some without family identification making their identity unknown.

After him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun son of Zalaph repaired portions of the wall.

It is not wholly clear if this Hananiah is the same referenced later in the book as a priest and head of his father's house and signee of the covenant of obedience (7:2,10:23,12:12,12:41).

After him Meshullam son Berechiah repaired the wall opposite his chamber.

This is the second portion of the wall that he was working on repairing (3:4).

His son-in-law was Tobiah's (an enemy of Nehemiah and the work) son (6:18).

Other references to Meshullams through the book are unclear, but unlikely him as he was fully referenced in an unfavorable way in 6:18.

¹⁹ Rasmussen, Pg.245

Malchijah 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 he was identified as a goldsmith.

Malchijah appears that he did a significant amount of work in the area. He is one of three Malchijah's referenced in his chapter and it is unclear of his possible referenced identity later in the book.

The goldsmiths and the merchants repaired the wall between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate.

This appears to complete a full accounting of the circuit of the work on the wall - beginning and ending with the Sheep Gate

Sidebar: New Walls Amidst Repairs

It is important to note here that a number of commentators concluded, based off of elements of the text and archeological findings, that portions of the wall on the east side of the city were not restored in the sense of being strengthened and built back up, but were in places moved and altogether rebuilt. This was likely on account of both the severe condition of the wall and the topography – the slope and crest associated with the Kidron Valley would present certain challenges and necessary adaptations.

The Importance of Walls

By way of summarizing this chapter, Breneman argues that the raising up of the walls and gates would serve not only as a military defensive function, but also as a symbolic defense/separation from the pagan influences around them.²⁰ This was effectively a major component of the Law too. It was not that certain clothing, habits, and restrictions inherently made Israel more godly, but it overtly distinguished and separated the people from the pervasive idolatry that was ever around them. Further, these elements appear to be immediately present in Nehemiah's mind too as observed in his initial repelling of opposition at the end of chapter two when he states, "The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem."²¹ It was clear that the walls provided Israel a context in which her distinct identity as the covenant people of God could properly thrive.

Jerusalem's Restoration: The Millennial Kingdom

While appreciating Jerusalem in this historical context I would also exhort you to not lose sight of the value of this most precious city's future glory. Jerusalem and the Temple have a restoration that has yet to be experienced, and this account in Nehemiah is a foretaste of that future. When Jesus Christ assumes the throne of his father David in Jerusalem and rules for a thousand years the nations will come to this beloved city to worship and pay homage.

The Prophet/Priest Ezekiel provides wonderful details of this restored Jerusalem and Temple in Ezekiel 39:25-48:35 and the Apostle John testifies to the Millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20:1-6.

²⁰ Breneman, Pg.192

²¹ Nehemiah 2:20

Jerusalem's Restoration: The Eternal State

Finally, Jerusalem will be the eternal city with no Temple, "...for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb."²²

The Apostle John who has testified to the Millennial reign of Christ also testifies to witnessing the inauguration of the eternal state and with it the New Heavens, New Earth, and New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:1-22:5

Nehemiah's Leadership in Restoration

Gene Getz draws out the organizational skill applied in the overseeing of this work by Nehemiah as demonstrated by the twenty-eight references to "next to him," "next to them," "next to that," "the next section," "beside him," and "beyond them."²³ It is also drawn out that in the later portions of the chapter when personal residences are referenced that the people worked in close proximity to their own residence. Getz observes four advantages with this: 1) the greater personal involvement and motivation, 2) no lost time traveling to do the work, 3) in an attack they would have greater motivation to hold their ground (especially if they had family), and 4) there would be a maximizing of man power with the involvement of the family.²⁴ On the flip side to this the men who came from other areas to assist with the work were tasked in less residential areas – balancing this principle by applying their labor where it was most needed.²⁵

Mervin Breneman draws out the leadership elements present here as Nehemiah is successfully coordinating the simultaneous work of approximately forty-five sections of construction/renovation.²⁶ Breneman goes on to state, "Planning all this building activity, organizing the groups, plus arranging the infrastructure to supply materials was no small accomplishment."²⁷

Regarding this I think it is important to draw out two important elements. Nehemiah must first and foremost be commended not for his management skills, but for his love for the Scriptures, the God of the Scriptures, and his faithfulness in prayer. I am persuaded that his natural gifting was further enhanced by the blessing and help of God for this unique work placed in his heart by God. It would be a shame to value a man's natural gifting while overlooking The Lord's kindness in supernaturally enabling him for a work that is clearly in accordance with God's expressed will.

The second important element that should not be overlooked is that while Nehemiah provided the necessary leadership for the work – it was the people walking in obedience and faithful service (for most if not all – well beyond their natural skill set) that ultimately made the work successful. There should be a joy in participating in the larger work. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that in the Church we all have a whole host of various roles, but they each serve their purpose and the body thrives when they are operating faithfully (1 Corinthians 12). Rejoice in unique leadership and thrive in faithful service.

²² Revelation 21:22

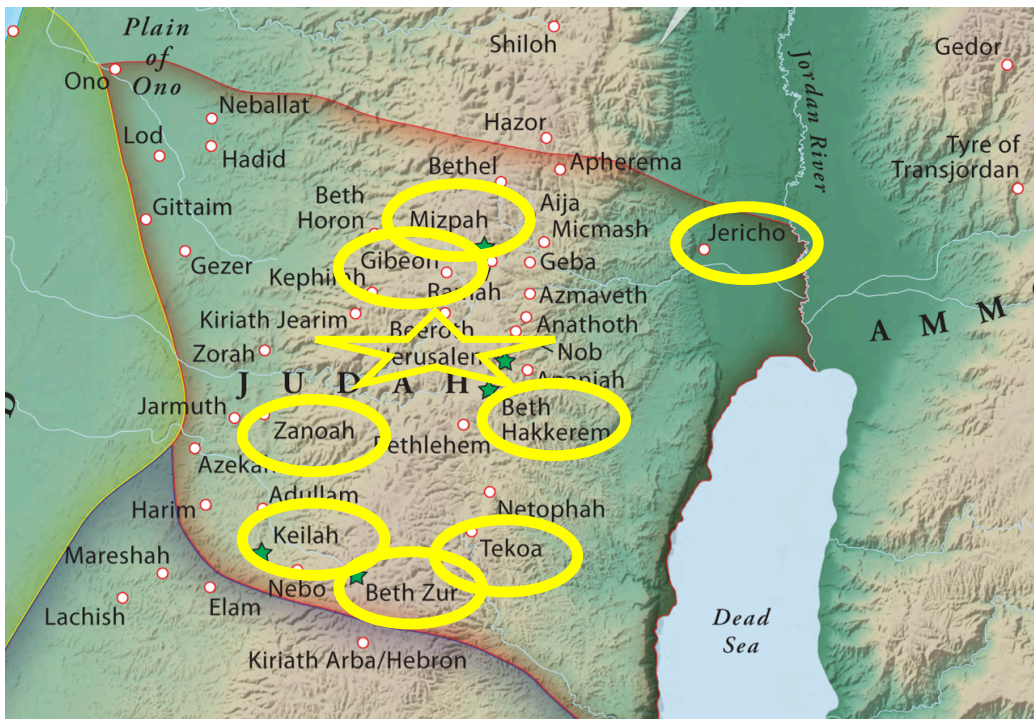
²³ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Ezra: Gene A. Getz, David C. Cook Publisher, 1985 (Hereafter: Getz), Pg.678

²⁴ Getz, Pg.678

²⁵ Getz, Pg.678

²⁶ Breneman, Pg.184

²⁷ Breneman, Pg.184



Portion of a regional map that includes Jerusalem and various cities referenced in the Nehemiah 3.²⁸

Reflection and Application

How does an appreciation of Jerusalem’s history help you better appreciate the details expressed in this chapter on its restoration under Nehemiah’s leadership?

What are five observations that you made when examining the account of the restoration through chapter three and how might they impact your thinking, your conduct, and/or your worship?

1) _____

2) _____

²⁸ Rasmussen, Pg.177

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

Write down some reflections on Jerusalem’s role through Redemptive History and its assured future – why do these details matter and how might they impact you as a student of the Scriptures?

What natural and/or spiritual principles have you gleaned from Nehemiah’s leadership as displayed here in chapter three?

Nehemiah 4

Psalm 20

"To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.
May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!
May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion!
May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! *Selah*
May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans!
May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners!
May the Lord fulfill all your petitions!
Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.
They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.
O Lord, save the king!
May he answer us when we call."

Introduction for Nehemiah 4

The city of Atlanta recently experienced an exceptional engineering accomplishment when a major bridge on I-85 was destroyed and subsequently rebuilt in six weeks. The principle company and its leadership was rightly lauded for their success and rewarded accordingly. The work was made possible by the abundance of money, resources, equipment, engineering excellence, logistical skills, and the raw determination of the people to work for the success of the project.

By contrast, the people of Judah under Nehemiah's leadership lacked so many of these natural advantages, and, as demonstrated in chapter four, they were a people not only despised by local enemies, but were under imminent threat from every side. The Jews did have the advantage of a uniquely gifted leader and were a people with a heart to work, but what made them successful both in this season of the labor and ultimately in the completion of an approximately nine-foot-thick wall that surrounded the entire city of Jerusalem in eight weeks (taking one of their seven days off every week) was that they were God's people doing God's work.

The Jews under Nehemiah's leadership had a heart for God and a mind to work. Fearing and placing their confidence in God and not man – they operated with bended knees as it were while carrying sword and trowel in hand.

When addressing Nehemiah 4:9, Mervin Breneman makes a statement that well summarizes the whole of Nehemiah four: "Nehemiah's response was clear: prayer and precaution, trust and good management. He trusted God, but he also was aware of the dangers and took the necessary precautions."²⁹

²⁹ Breneman, Pg.196

4:1-3, External Mockery by Antagonistic Neighboring Governors

Sanballat, who also governed in the region, was clearly aware that there was activity and progress underway in Jerusalem as the work of Nehemiah and the people was well known in the region.

Sanballat's engagement with the Jews up to this time had been disdainful, as was plainly expressed in his last appearance in chapter two.

2:10, Sanballat was introduced in the narrative with expressing great displeasure that someone was seeking the welfare of the Jews (here identified by their national and geographical identity - the people of Israel). This is quite concerning that he so abhorred the people of God, and this posturing put him in a dangerous position as can be observed from the promise expressed by The LORD to the Israelite patriarch Abram: "I [The LORD] will bless those who bless you [Abraham and descendants], and him who dishonors you [Abraham and descendants] I [The LORD] will curse...." Genesis 12:3

2:19, Sanballat responded to the people affirming Nehemiah's call to the work with the blessing of The LORD with jeering and by despising the people - accompanied by artificial accusation of Nehemiah and the people's motives. Nehemiah in turn responded to Sanballat's accusation by directly rebuking him (and the others who joined this accusation) and disassociating them from Jerusalem. Here it would appear that both Sanballat and Nehemiah identified the Jews and their welfare with Jerusalem and that Sanballat desired the welfare of neither.

Now, here in chapter four, where there was record of the people's substantial progress in the work the text again returns its attention to the fuming disdain of Sanballat and his company of opposition.

Sanballat was angry - he was internally fuming with disapproval and disdain.

Sanballat was greatly enraged - he was substantially (self) provoked to great anger.

Sanballat was mocking or jeering at the Jews - effectively demonstrating an utter lack of respect toward them.

Sanballat had an extremely strong response to the progress and success of the Jews in their restoration of Jerusalem.

As the Scriptures make plain – out of the heart the mouth speaks – and Sanballat's hatred of the Jews and their progress spilled out in vile disdain of mockery. Further, Sanballat's mocking or jeering was not a private affair, but in the presence of others - he was publically airing his disdain over the Jews' success and efforts.

The region that Sanballat governed was Samaria, just north of Judah.³⁰ As a regional governor himself Sanballat had people around him and under his immediate influence, including those referenced to as his brothers and even a military force. While ultimately under the Persians the army would have served as an immediate resource in the area for the Persians and a means of regional defense for themselves.

In his mocking Sanballat asked one foundational question that was accompanied by four additional supporting questions. He asked what are the Jews doing?

³⁰ Rasmussen, Pg.176

He plainly knew what they were doing, though he may have been suspicious of their stated and actual motivation which he has already challenged by way of prior threats.

He did not frame the question with a neutral tone - rather he referred to the Jews as "feeble" or weak, yet he was clearly distressed at their success.

It appears that he was questioning their motivation again: restoration of the walls and/or city - was this a work for themselves?

In the plainest sense the answer would be yes, they were in a plain sense restoring the city for themselves, but that this was wholly understood from the start. However, in the larger sense this was a work unto and for God's glory.

While likely not intended as such, the question regarding sacrifices spoke to the heart of the matter – the Jews were a distinct people who worshipped The LORD in a prescribed manner which included a robust sacrificial system. Therefore, an element of motivation for the walls of Jerusalem being rebuilt would certainly be to maintain the integrity of Temple worship. However, the intent of the reference to the Jews' sacrifices would likely have been a reference to sacrifices of thanksgiving upon the wall's completion – the inference of the mockery being that they would not be successful.³¹

The question of timing seems to be only one of mocking and itself was absurd. For what reason would they finish in a day or who would be so audacious as to say this was a possibility on any level? Gene Getz states, "The question about finishing in a day suggests that the Jews did not know what they were undertaking."³²

The question about reviving the stones seems to further build on the prior mockery. The condition of Jerusalem and the walls was known to be terrible when they began and this seems to infer that they only have useless materials to draw from and will therefore fail - that their efforts are all but vanity.

While biting, the mockery ultimately appears to betray the enemies' fear - because if the matter of their mockery had substance then the efforts and works of the Jews would have been little more than a nuisance. This was an exercise in cold war tactics where the aggressor sought to strip the heart of their opponents' will to persevere and see their own work as futile.

Tobiah, governor of the province of Transjordan/Gilead (east of Judah)³³, while in the presence of Sanballat, having heard his derision and mockery of the Jews and their work, also joined in the slander. He was mocking that the wall was of such poor quality and structure that a simple fox would cause its physical demise.

Tobiah's own engagement with the Jews up to this time had been in immediate tandem with Sanballat's as also observed from chapter two.

³¹ Getz, Pg.681

³² Getz, Pg.681

³³ Rasmussen, Pg.177

2:10, Tobiah too was introduced in the narrative with expressing great displeasure that someone was seeking the welfare of the Jews (here identified by their national and geographical identity - the people of Israel). Again, this was quite concerning that he so abhorred the people of God and it put him in a dangerous position: "I [The LORD] will bless those who bless you [Abraham and descendants], and him who dishonors you [Abraham and descendants] I [The LORD] will curse...." Genesis 12:3

2:19, Tobiah too responded to the people affirming Nehemiah's call to the work with the blessing of The LORD with jeering and by despising the people - accompanied by artificial accusation of Nehemiah and the people's motives. As stated, Nehemiah responded to Sanballat and Tobiah's accusation by directly rebuking them and disassociating them from Jerusalem.

It was clear that Sanballat, Tobiah, and Nehemiah all identified the Jews and their welfare with Jerusalem and that Tobiah also desired the welfare of neither.

Reflection and Application

Sanballat, Tobiah, and others despised the Jewish people. Consider the promise made to Abram in Genesis 12 that would lay the foundation for the full Abrahamic Covenant: "I [The LORD] will bless those who bless you [Abraham and descendants], and him who dishonors you [Abraham and descendants] I [The LORD] will curse...." Genesis 12:3

Reflect on the aggressive hostility expressed here in view of that Covenant Promise to Israel, a promise made to Abraham and that endures to this present day.

Sanballat and company were exercising a well-worn tactic of the greater enemy as expressed in verses three and four of Charitie Lees Bancroft's classic hymn
Before The Throne of God,

*"When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look, and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin."*

*"Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free; for God, the Just, is satisfied to look
on Him and pardon me."*

In view of this, how does a proper understanding that Christ will bring those who are his to maturity shape your daily life?

4:4-5, Nehemiah's Prayer in Response to External Opposition and Mockery

Nehemiah petitions God in response to the mockery and slander from the surrounding peoples, namely Sanballat and Tobiah. In this Nehemiah was affirming his confidence in God and not simply himself - he looked to God to vindicate the wrong. Further, he was affirming that this was God's work exercised by God's people and to oppose or slander it was to oppose and slander God.

Nehemiah affirms that they, God's people, were despised. It was not the wall that was the heart of the issue, but their personal welfare and striving toward success.

Nehemiah expresses the aforementioned slander and mockery under the sweeping identification of being despised - an offense that he brought directly to the Lord.

Nehemiah makes three requests in this prayer:

- 1) For God's people to be heard, even as they were being despised by others.
- 2) For God to apply the same justice to their enemies that has been applied to them - a proper judgment of which they are just now being restored from its consequences.
- 3) For God to not apply mercy toward those who would mock and slander an endeavor that demonstrates God's mercy toward his own covenant people.

Nehemiah framed his prayer in the context of God's people doing God's work and being despised. He requested that the very thing that their enemies were antagonistically pursuing be applied to them - that their taunt be turned on their own heads.

It must be remembered that this was not a neutral conflict where there were two parties of equal innocence or guilt – this was God's people who were being taunted, and specifically God's people who were in the earliest stages of restoration by God, *as promised*.

Nehemiah, because of the disdainful treatment of Israel who was being restored from their own time of being plundered and taken captive, asked that these enemies now also might know the bitter taste of the full scope of their experience too.

Here it is important to take careful note of Nehemiah's language. He is not praying that they be damned to hell or that they be uniquely punished for their sin. Those elements are effectively already in motion – they have sinned, they have offended God, and they will give an account for their offenses. Further, it is important to recognize that while justification is and has always been by faith alone (see Romans 4-5), there has nevertheless been a general restriction of proactive judgment to various degrees withheld from the nations (in the natural life and experiences of men). Nehemiah appears to be petitioning not that these enemies would not be reconciled with God, but that their offenses would not be passed over in this temporal/natural life – he was requesting an accounting for these offenses.

Nehemiah understood, as must we, that the guilt or iniquities or offenses of Nehemiah's enemies were ultimately guilt/iniquities/offenses against God first and his people second. This was most plainly demonstrated as Nehemiah more precisely addresses these offenses as sins before God and that God alone can address the offense of sin.

Nehemiah goes on to explain the grounds for his petition: for/because the offending conduct was in the presence of the people of God undertaking this special work of God and such conduct is both offensive to God and hurtful to the people. Further, this offense applied most immediately to the people was said to have provoked God to anger.

Sidebar: Does The New Covenant Believer Pray Imprecatory Prayers Too?

Gene Getz provided a helpful treatment of how to understand the seemingly harsh nature of Nehemiah’s prayer as New Covenant believers who have been called upon to love our enemies. He provides a four-part response:³⁴

- 1) The enemies were opposing God in their offense.
- 2) God had already expressed that Israel’s enemies would be judged – this was the expressed will of God.
- 3) God had already expressed like consequences in the Abrahamic Covenant – this was the expressed will of God.
- 4) The prayer accurately expresses that vengeance is God’s and not man’s work – this is not a request for authorization to act, but for God to carry out his expressed will.

Mervin Breneman also offers some like insights regarding a proper understanding of Nehemiah’s prayer:³⁵

- 1) The prayer was one requesting divine judgment – the application of the justice of God.
- 2) The prayer was a request for God to act – not permission to act oneself.
- 3) The prayers was an expression of zeal for God and his work.

Breneman further speaks to this matter and how a New Covenant believer can understand its present application. He states, “Christians are under the new covenant and are admonished to love our enemies and to make it our primary concern to lead a wicked world to faith and forgiveness through the message of the cross. Nevertheless, God’s people can ask him to judge injustice and to thwart the plans of those who would hinder God’s work.”³⁶

Reflection and Application

Consider all the possible reactions that the enemies’ mocking and slandering could have produced – what do you think of Nehemiah’s response? What should your response be in a situation in which you are unjustly mocked and slandered?

³⁴ Getz, Pg.682
³⁵ Beneman, Pgs.194-195
³⁶ Breneman, Pg.195

Consider the three elements of Nehemiah's prayer and note what you can learn from them given his immediate historical context.

What is the New Covenant believer's liberty and/or responsibility regarding praying in an imprecatory manner? Can this be an honest petition for justice or was this reserved for Israel?

4:6, The Success of the Work Continued

In the context of opposition, the work persisted, and here Nehemiah provided the progress report that the complete circuit of the wall was finished up to half of the wall's height. Nehemiah credited the people who had "a mind/heart to work."

Clearly the opposition was not effective in its efforts – the workers continued in their work and success accompanied their efforts.

"So we built the wall: the sturdy simplicity of that statement, and of the behaviour it records, makes Sanballat and his friends suddenly appear rather small and shrill, dwarfed by the faith, unity and energy of the weak."³⁷

Reflection and Application

Was the success of the progress just a reflection of Nehemiah and the Jews being a tenacious people or was there more to it? What might you learn from their character in this?

³⁷ Kidner, Pg.99

4:7-8 Increased Disdain and Opposition from Outside Enemies

Here two familiar enemies are personally named (Sanballat and Tobiah) as well as three groups (Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites) who were resolved to oppose the Jews and their work. These persons and groups were very/greatly angry that the work of the walls was progressing - most directly observed in the closing of the breaches.

These respective groups had a history with Israel... and the men singled out as leading opposition were tied to most of them too.

Tobiah was an Ammonite (2:10,19)

Geshem was an Arab (2:19)

Geshem was not singled out here, but was an overt opponent of Nehemiah, the people, and the work as observed in 2:19.

Israel's enemies were literally coming from all sides: Sanballat and the Samaritans from the north, the Ammonites from the east, the Arabians from the South, and the Ashdodites from the west.³⁸

We also observe here that the corporate assembly of these enemies plotted/conspired together to fight against Jerusalem – causing confusion in it. This speaks to how pronounced their disdain was for the Jews and this work – the securing of regional alliances prepared to assault a people and work authorized by the king.

Here it appears that the enemies' mission was not the murdering or eradication of the Jews, but the undermining of Jerusalem's welfare (which, as has been established, the Jews' welfare was effectively bound up in the city's welfare). However, as becomes more apparent later, the murdering of the Jews was determined to be an effective way to stop the work and this was an element of their expressed plans (4:11).

Fundamentally what was observed here was that with increased success came increased opposition and subsequently a revision of defensive measures.³⁹

Reflection and Application

How does understanding details such as geography help good Bible study?

³⁸ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.128

³⁹ Getz, Pg.682

How can someone understand struggle and frustration when they are walking in obedience and acting on the clearly articulated will of God? What might you apply to your own life from this conclusion?

4:9, Nehemiah and the People First Armed themselves with Prayer and then Guards for the City

Nehemiah and the people's response to this threat was to pray to God. In addition to petitioning God, Nehemiah and the people set up a guard for protection - day and night. They applied divine diligence first - entrusting themselves to God who is the sovereign of all men, and then they also applied personal diligence in securing an around the clock guard. These two actions are not inconsistent, the matter is one of primary and secondary importance and execution.

It is clear that there was no special merit to being a pacifist – to the contrary it was wholly expected that the people be prepared to fight, but with their first and primary confidence not being in another or in a weapon, but in God.

Two samples of this are in Isaiah 31 and Psalm 20.

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord!" Isaiah 31:1

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Psalm 20:7

Reflection and Application

What does it mean to apply “divine diligence” first? What should this look like for you?

How does someone walk the delicate tightrope of confidence in God while taking proper action? How do you preserve yourself from self-deception in this area?

4:10-14, Discouragement, Threats, Recalibration, and Godly Resolve

4:10, Internal Struggle

“The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall.” Nehemiah 4:10

The statement cited here was structured in poetic form and may have been sung by the workers during this uniquely challenging time. Interestingly it is proposed that while morose in nature, it still may have been a means of prodding them along as they preserved in the labor.⁴⁰

The people were physically, emotionally, and spiritually tired. The nature of the task underway was exceptional and, while they had known such a wonderful measure of success to this preset time, there was still so much before them. To further exasperate matters, they were now being mocked and threatened from every side.

As described in chapter three there was a great diversity of workers from all around and from all walks of life, and they were faithfully executing the task. However, before them was more rubble, more reminders of judgment/shame, and so much more work to see the wall completed. Further, they would have well understood that the wall would be of no use until all breaches were closed and it was built to a sufficient height, so until such a time they were busy to prevailing benefit.

This was a season of the work where leadership was imperative – to speak truth to the people, to restore their gaze on God, and to prepare them for victory should battle come to them.

4:11, External Threats

These enemies were the aforementioned persons and groups referenced in 4:7-8, and it was now clear that they were prepared to use lethal force to stop the progress of the work in Jerusalem. The plan that was circulating either by gathered intelligence or common rumor that the intention was to discreetly penetrate the Jewish camp, kill the people, and stop the work. This was a more sinister plot and demoralizing strategy than an expressed plan to engage the people in traditional combat.

4:12, Inadvertent Discouragers

It appears that the Jews who lived near the adversaries were growing wise to their plotting, though it was not clear if this was because of overt planning and posturing by the enemies or because the Jews in these areas heard of it firsthand.

Regardless of how they knew of the threats, the Jews were coming from all around Jerusalem and sounding the alarm by way of repeatedly petitioning that the people return to them.

It does not appear that these Jews were attempting to discourage the work, but to preserve the welfare of the laborers. However, an element of the pleas for the Jews to return to their respective regions possibly had an element of regional protective concerns included too.

⁴⁰ Breneman, Pg.197

These various places had sent their strong and able men to participate in the work in Jerusalem. With these perceived imminent threats around them, these regions were also immediately vulnerable, and they would remain vulnerable if their men were otherwise engaged or killed in Jerusalem.⁴¹

4:13, A Tactical Response

Nehemiah responded to the threats and concerns by taking proactive defensive measures that would maximize his resources and not stop the advancement of the work. It appears that Nehemiah stationed people in the wall's most vulnerable locations - presumably to prevent the perimeter from being penetrated. These areas also may have afforded two other advantages: providing the ability to see a threat from further away and to be seen (presenting a robust defensive build up that would communicate a readiness for battle).

Nehemiah stationed people by their clans/families. This was likely both for organizational purposes and for the tactical advantage that a man would sooner stand his ground and fight if his family was in the immediate balance. This was also a pattern that Israel had maintained – identifying and grouping the people by families/clans.

Nehemiah also made sure that the people were properly armed for combat: swords, spears, and bows.

4:14, A Renewed Call to Arms

Nehemiah first addressed the leadership, but also spoke to all the people, and he gave them a battle charge - he did not generically encourage them, but directly prepared them for battle. Nehemiah was himself prepared to lead the people in armed conflict to protect Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

In preparing the people, Nehemiah exhorted them toward a right view and fear of God and not man. He exhorted the people to not be afraid of their enemies – which would have been the most natural disposition when surrounded by a people seeking their death and destruction. Nehemiah also exhorted the people to remember the Lord who is great and awesome - *he was directing their attention away from the fear of man and toward the majesty of the incomparable God* (they were his people and they were busy about his work – therefore The LORD was the most natural place to find solace).

Note that Nehemiah *prays as he talks and talks as he prays*:

"O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments." (1:5)

"Remember *the Lord, who is great and awesome*, and fight..." (4:14)

"Now, therefore, *our God the great, the mighty, and the awesome God*, who keeps covenant and steadfast love..." (9:32)

Nehemiah first exhorted the people to have a right view of man and of God and then charged them to fight and fight with everything precious in mind and before them: fight for your brothers, fight for your sons, fight for your daughters, fight for your wives, and fight for your homes.

⁴¹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.128

Nehemiah exhorted them to give themselves to the full and possibly complete demands of combat for something more than just themselves – spend, and if necessary sacrifice, themselves for others and the greater good. This was a cry for a just and good battle.

Reflection and Application

The clouds of discouragement will come – sometimes more readily for some than others. What is the best solution for such occasions/seasons?

How might we become inadvertent discouragers? How can we seek to prevent producing struggle in others by our “concerns” and “worries”?

In Nehemiah's exhortation for the people to not be fearful of their enemies (a strong potential) he directs their attention to the character and nature of God - he is great and fearful/awesome (a proper perspective). The implicit redirect is to fear God and not man. How can you apply this to your life?

4:15-20, A Return to the Work with Tactical Vigilance

Derek Kinder provides a helpful framing of this final section: “This is the fourth of Nehemiah’s prompt counter-moves in a single chapter. He was not a man to fight new battles with old tactics. Taunts had been met by prayer and concentrated work (1-6); plots by prayer and guard-duty (7-9); stronger threats by a general call to arms and the charge to ‘keep you minds on the Lord... and fight’ (10-14, cf. JB). Now the temporary lull is accepted for what it is: a chance to start building again, but not to disarm.”⁴²

Note a critical order of events that were articulated here:

1) The enemies of the Jews heard of their progress and were angry and intended to murderously stop them. (4:1-3,7-8,11)

⁴² Kidner, Pg.101

- 2) The people of God who were exercising a proper fear of God over against a fear of man gave themselves to prayer and shrewd conduct. (4:4,9,14)
- 3) The great and awesome God of Israel frustrated the plans of the enemies of God's people and the work of God by the people of God continued. (4:15)
- 4) The enemies appeared to have cowered down when the people were prepared to boldly engage them. (4:15)
- 5) When the plans of the enemies were frustrated/broken then the people of God returned to their work. (4:15-23)

Ultimately it was not that the people were prepared for combat, but that this was among the means that God chose to frustrate the plans and wicked intentions of the enemy.

There was a division of labor that occurred from this time forward - there were half who continued with the work of construction and half who served as armor bearers - allowing the labor to continue and an immediate tactical response to a threat requiring repulsion by raw combat.

The difference with this and one who is fearing man and maintaining a morbid focus on self-preservation can only be parsed and discerned at the level of one's heart. The place where confidence in God and faithfulness in preparation and action meet is a challenging intersection that will require honest and consistent self-examination, repentance, and recalibration of confidence. This is the same delicate balance applied in loving service to others - there is certainly an element of personal reward and satisfaction, but that cannot be what governs one's motivation - the heart of the person is the only one who can truly discern its motivations and it must be vigilantly examined and kept in pure check.

Note that while ultimately it appears that there was a clear distinction in labor and defense among the workers as a whole, there also appears to be a clear distinction when Nehemiah here references his "servants." It would appear that there was a subset of the greater whole of the workers and people that he had in mind.

"...half of my *servants* worked on construction...." (4:16) - A group identified under the authority and care of Nehemiah.

"Let every man and *his servant* pass the night within Jerusalem...." (4:22) - A group that is clearly not inclusive all persons - otherwise you cannot make the distinction between the men and their servants.

"So neither I nor my brothers nor *my servants* nor the men of the guard...." (4:23) - A group that is clearly not inclusive all persons - otherwise you cannot make the distinction between Nehemiah, his brothers, his servants, and the men of the guard.

"...I and my brother and *my servants* are lending...." (5:10) - A distinguished group of independent actors.

"Even *their servants* lorded it over the people." (5:15) - A distinguished group of independent actors.

"...and all *my servants* were gathered there for the work." (5:16) - A distinguished group of independent actors who had participated in the work on the wall.

"And I stationed some of *my servants* at the gates...." (13:19) - A subset of persons fulfilling an independently assigned task.

The burden carriers appear to have been a specifically assigned group - they were the movers of rubble and/or material and they effectively only used one hand for labor and the other being combat ready (weapon hand/reaction hand, or in this case labor hand). This was in tandem with those assigned to be armor bearers who provided immediate access to weapons and defensive tools that would not be as conducive to have on one's persons while working.

The leaders were behind their respective people to provide immediate encouragement, instruction, and if necessary military command.⁴³

Those who carried burdens were prepared in one way and those who were doing construction were prepared in another way that was more conducive to their respective work. These men had their swords strapped to their side while they worked providing use of both hands and a ready defense if needed.

The final, and critical assignment, was given to a man specially charged with the sounding the trumpet/alarm. This man appears to have been assigned to Nehemiah's side as the governor also served as people's general here too.

Nehemiah's tactical defense plan wisely considered the vulnerability that being spread out produced, which was just the nature of the work, so he provided a clear plan that all would rally together to the place of necessary defense/combat - the place where the trumpet was sounding (meaning where they would also find him).

Nehemiah had given the call to arms, exhorting the people to remember their great and fearful/awesome God, and to prepare to engage in combat in 4:14 - here the larger sweep of the context comes in and the call was more completely framed in the truth that, "Our God will fight for us."

This was the experience of Joshua and the generation of Israel that conquered the promised land - they were the ones engaged in physical combat, but it was The LORD who was fighting their battles (at the time this was particularly pronounced as supernatural elements in precise moments contributed to their overwhelming success).

This also demonstrates the residual tension that is consistently present in the Scriptures - from salvation to sanctification the work is God's work and he will accomplish his purposes. Still, in the midst of this process he expects and uses the natural efforts and affairs of men. In this context, potential hand to hand combat was quite a personal experience, but still the work of God would champion their efforts and cause.

⁴³ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.129

Reflection and Application

Nehemiah and the Jews had a very precise context that led to carrying swords and tools and dividing their labor forces. What might you learn from this decision and its faithful execution among the people?

There was significant hearing and responding in this chapter - in a culture that is communication dense, what is the nature of your own hearing, speaking, and responding? Does it intentionally direct and finally culminate in a confidence in God expressed in your natural conduct and prayer? Perhaps it might be a wise discipline to pursue that you pray more than you "post" or petition more than you "share"?

Record your thoughts/observations below.

1. "Now when Sanballat heard...." (4:1)
2. "And [Sanballat] said in the presence of his brothers and the army of Samaria...." (4:2)
3. "Tobiah the Ammonite was beside [Sanballat], and he said...." (4:3)
4. "Hear, O our God...." (4:4)
5. "...when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard...." (4:7)
6. "And [the Jews] prayed to [their] God...." (4:9)
7. "In Judah it was said...." (4:10)
8. "And [the Jews'] enemies said...." (4:11)
9. "...the Jews who lived near them came from all directions and said...." (4:12)
10. "And [Nehemiah] looked and arose and said...." (4:14)
11. "When [the Jews'] enemies heard...." (4:15)
12. "I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people...." (4:19)
13. "I also said to the people at that time...." (4:22)

4:21-23 A Culture of Alertness and Labor

Even with the new defensive preparedness the work continued. The potentially imminent threat of attack did not thwart the work.

The labor filled the entire day - from sun up to sun down. While half held spears the other half labored.

There were the defensive measures in place during the day when the labor was active and Nehemiah also had proactive defensive measures in place for the night hours too.

Nehemiah had the men and their servants stay within Jerusalem to serve as guards through the night and as laborers by day.

The nature of this work and its commitment was one that required their whole person and whole time - resting and working. Even though this was God's work by God's people it was absolutely consuming, but not without reward.

Finally, Nehemiah demonstrated his leadership not only by fixing the people on God rather than a fear of man, establishing a comprehensive tactical defense plan that provided a context in which the work would continue, and posturing himself as a leader in the hottest place of contest should it come, but he also endured hardship as a good soldier with the people.

Nehemiah and those in his company did not assume a posture of relaxation, but remained vigilant at all times - making themselves immediately ready to fight alongside the people.

There was not a time that the people's guard was wholly lowered – they consistently maintained a posture that first and foremost reflected a genuine fear of God and not man, while staying busy about their entrusted work.

Reflection and Application

What can you learn from Nehemiah's decision to so completely identify with the people that he too chose to remain clothed and battle ready?

The labor and posturing of a ready defense became an around the clock context for this season of the people's lives. How might you prepare for special seasons of endurance in service?
