

NEHEMIAH 3

THE BUILDERS OF THE WALL

Talk is cheap. *Saying* and *doing* are two very different things. Many people are ready to say, “Let us rise up and build,” and yet they sit still and do nothing – like that fair-spoken son in Jesus’ parable who said, “I go, Sir,” but did not go. However, the undertakers of this building project on the walls of Jerusalem were none of that sort! As soon as they had resolved to build the wall around their city, they lost no time. Let it never be said that we left that good work to be done tomorrow, which we might as well have done today.

This chapter gives an account of two things. First, it gives the names of the builders, which are recorded here to their honor; for they exhibited great zeal for God and their country, as well as a great degree of public industry and courage. What they did, therefore, was worthy to be recorded – both for their praise, and also for the encouragement of others to follow their example. But this chapter also details the order in which the wall was built; it was constructed by various individuals and teams working in sections around the perimeter of the city.

Several things are worthy of special observation in this account of the building of the wall. Eliashib the high priest, with his priestly brethren, led the way among this troop of builders. The Lord’s ministers should be foremost in every good work; for their office obliges them to teach and encourage by their example, as well as by their doctrine. The priests repaired the sheep gate, through which the sheep that were sacrificed in the Temple were brought in.

The builders were very many, and each one took his share in this work – some more and some less – according to their ability. Many hands make light work, and every child of God should lend a hand toward the building up of Christ’s Church. Several rulers, both of Jerusalem and of other cities, were also active in this work; they considered themselves bound to do the utmost that their wealth and power enabled them to do for the furtherance of this good work. On the other hand, a just reproach was laid upon the noblemen of Tekoa; they did not apply their shoulders to the work of the Lord. They acted as if the dignity and liberty of their nobility were a discharge from serving God and doing good, which are indeed the highest honor and the truest freedom.

Outline of the chapter:

The wall of Jerusalem is repaired in sections...

- ❖ *From the sheep gate to the fish gate – verses 1-2*
- ❖ *From the fish gate to the “old gate” – verses 3-5*
- ❖ *From the “old gate to the valley gate – verses 6-12*
- ❖ *From the valley gate to the refuse gate to the fountain gate – verses 13-15*
- ❖ *From the fountain gate to the water gate – verses 16-25*
- ❖ *From the water gate to the horse gate – verses 26-27*
- ❖ *From the horse gate to the gate of Miphkad, and back around to the sheep gate – verses 28-32*

It is interesting that no mention was made of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. Did he do nothing? Certainly not! Although he personally undertook no particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of the others; for he had the oversight of them all. Half of his servants worked on the wall, and the other half stood as sentinels (as we are told in chapter 4:16). But he himself personally walked the rounds – directing and encouraging the builders, applying his hands to the work where he saw a need, and keeping a watchful eye upon the movements of the enemies... whom we shall meet in the next chapter!



This chapter has much practical application to our lives today. The work of building the walls of the holy city required trust in the promises of God, as well as a putting of the shoulder to the work. This was a grass-roots effort on everyone's part; it required hard physical labor and the sweat of the builders' brows. People and leaders from Jerusalem were involved in this work, but the laborers also included people from the surrounding towns. It was not just the common folk who joined in this project, but also members of the trade guilds – the wealthy people of the day. And it was not just men, either. Although the ladies were not physically employed in the woodwork and stonemasonry, their work of encouraging and assisting the builders was not forgotten by the Lord.

Jehovah had promised to bring His people back to their homeland, and to cause them to prosper. But there was still work for them to do! This should encourage us to stop and examine our own lives. Are we merely happy with God's promises, and content to simply sit around and wait for them to "just happen"? God does not intend for believers to be sedentary people. Are we diligently working to build, repair, and maintain the walls of our Christian life? Is our wall of relationships strong? Are we building up our marriages with precious stones? Are we praying for generations to come? What about the wall of our character? Are we building up that section of the wall? How about the refuse gate? Is filthy garbage coming out of our mouths, or are we using our tongues to build up and encourage one another? Is there still a breach in the wall around our souls, through which Satan and his sneaky forces can gain an entrance into our hearts, by what we absorb with our eyes or listen to with our ears? Or is he sealed out with a strong gate? Is the wall around our souls maintained by the Word of God, and by personal and family devotions? Do we inspect the prayer-section of our wall every day? Let us beseech the Lord for grace to not treat this matter thoughtlessly! Let us ask Him for strength to diligently and regularly inspect the walls of defense around our souls, and to repair and build up the places where there are breaches yet to be found!

Praise the Lord Jesus for the recovery of our souls from the captivity of sin and Satan; for the building up of the walls of the Church; and for the bringing home of His redeemed people to Zion, with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads! Amen.