

Swing Wide the Gates

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series from **Jerry Vines Ministries**
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Let's Begin

When we begin to read Nehemiah 3, we may think it is one of those “boring” chapters in the Bible. It is like one of the “begat” chapters, filled with difficult names to pronounce. The truth is there is no such thing as a boring chapter in God’s Word. It is usually our inability to understand why the Lord included the chapter in the canon of Scripture that is the issue. And sometimes in the most unlikely places, we can find the greatest blessings. Nehemiah 3 is one of those hidden treasures. It actually qualifies as one of the most exciting and interesting chapters in the Word of God. It is God’s record of those who were faithful to the task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

The names we are going to read in Nehemiah 3 may not mean a great deal to us, but they certainly meant something to the people whose names were listed. Using the outline below, let’s look at the names and learn how Nehemiah leads the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Instead of taking the chapter a section of verses at a time, we want to look at the verses together. As we look at the names and Nehemiah’s leadership, we will definitely be encouraged as we work and live for the Lord.

I. Superior Organization (vv. 1-32)

II. Splendid Cooperation (vv. 1-32)

III. Spiritual Illumination (vv. 1-32)

I. Superior Organization (vv. 1-32)

At times people have said the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not an organization, but it is an organism. That is to say it is a living entity. This statement is correct, yet there is something incorrect about it. The church is the body of Jesus Christ. It is definitely alive. But it is wrong to think that because the church is an organism, it doesn’t need to be organized. Our bodies are organisms, but our bodies are certainly organized. Each body part is organized to have a specific responsibility and place

in our bodies. If our body parts were not organized, we would be in big trouble. Well, just as our bodies, which are organisms, are organized, the body of Christ should be organized. As a gifted leader and remarkable organizer, Nehemiah understood the importance of organization. His superior organization is evident throughout the chapter.

First Nehemiah has the people follow a definite design. If we had a map of the wall of Jerusalem as it existed in that day, we

would see his design. All the workers were assigned to the different sections of the wall. Every section was covered. The workers knew where they were supposed to work. This reminds us it is important for us to have a design to follow as we build our churches and personal lives. The good news is God has given us the design, and it is found in the pages of His Word. We don’t have to wonder what design we should follow. And we will never go wrong by following the design God has given to us in the



Bible. As the children of Israel work on the walls, we read two words throughout the chapter. The first is “built” (vv. 2,3,14) and the second is “repaired” (vv. 4-24,27-32). They built and they repaired. The word “built” means they added new things. They put something new into the wall. The word “repair” means they made strong what was already there. They renovated and strengthened what was already there.

That’s exactly what we have to do as the body of Christ. There are times we need to add something new in our lives. A church may add a new Sunday School class because it realizes there is a need for one. As Christians, we may add new faithfulness. There was a time we possibly only went to church on Sunday mornings. But as we began to grow in the Lord, we started adding new things like the Sunday evening and mid-week services.

We also need to be aware when something needs to be repaired

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or strengthened. In our personal lives, we may need to mend a relationship and forgiveness is needed. A pastor may realize his members are becoming weary in well-doing. They have slacked off in their church faithfulness or witnessing. He then needs to lead his people in repairing or strengthening those weaknesses.

He may preach a specific message or message series to do this.

Another thing we notice in Nehemiah’s organization is the people’s thoroughness and attention to detail. Verse 3 talks about how the sons of Hassenaah “laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.” They didn’t skip over anything. They gave attention to every part of their work and did it well. That’s exactly the way we ought to work. We should never be satisfied with second-best in doing the work of the Lord.

Reflection Connection

Read Colossians 3:23 and discuss how this verse applies to our lives at church as well as away from church.

II. Splendid Cooperation (vv. 1-32)

At least 48 individuals and groups are named in Nehemiah 3. In all probability, everybody who worked on the project is not named. But God chose to name the ones listed. We can learn two lessons from these names. First, it is never wrong to express appreciation to others. In fact, many times it is good to do so. The Bible tells us, “Render ... honor to whom honor is due”

(Rom. 13:7). At the same time, it should never bother us if we are not recognized in our work for the Lord. We don’t want to do what we do in order to get recognition. If we are doing it for Jesus, He knows about it. And He doesn’t forget. Hebrews 6:10 reminds us, “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love ...” This verse reminds us God is keeping the

records. He knows what we are doing.

Notice the unity of the workers. At least 15 times we read one of these phrases, “and next unto him built” (vv. 2,8); “next to them built” (vv. 4,5,7,9,10); or “next unto him repaired” (vv. 8,10,12,17,19). It is a picture of everyone working together in unity. Some of the people



even came from out of town to help. We read about the men of Jericho in verse 2 and the men from Tekoa, a neighboring city, in verse 5.

We also find different groups of people working on the wall. Eliashib, the high priest, and the priests are working (v. 1). In verse 8 the goldsmiths and apothecaries (or perfume makers) are listed. A man named Shallum, who ruled half of Jerusalem, works with his daughters (v. 12). This lets us know the women were even involved! In verse 31 we read about the merchants working. The people represent all kinds of trades and professions. Yet, we see them working together in unity, using their gifts and abilities.

The people working with Nehemiah are a reminder of our churches today. Consider all the different people that make up a church. Churches have professional people like doctors and lawyers. They have educators and laborers, people in private business, and homemakers. So many kinds of people make up the body of Christ. And God has gifted every believer with one or more spiritual gifts (cp. 1 Cor. 12:4-11). It is a beautiful thing to see God's people, regardless of what their backgrounds or specialties may be, joining together in splendid cooperation to get the work of God done.

Chapter 3 also shows us the intensity of the workers. For instance, verse 1 says, "... they

sanctified it ..." The people understood the spiritual nature of what they were doing. They recognized it was the Lord's work. When we are doing something and we understand we are to do it "as unto the Lord" (cp. Eph. 6:5-7), it puts intensity into what we do.

Verse 20 tells us, "And after him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece ..." The Bible says we

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ought to be "... fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). That is what Baruch was doing. He was giving the work everything he had. It is wonderful to see people who serve the Lord with all of their hearts.

Another phrase we see twice is when someone "repaired the other piece" (vv. 11,20). These are those people who weren't

satisfied to do only what had been assigned to them. When they finished their assignment, they looked for something else to do.

While there were those who diligently worked, verse 5 tells us about Tekoite nobles, "... but their nobles put not their necks to the work of the Lord." They basically refused to work. Evidently they thought they were above manual labor. The good news is they could not discourage the other people. Look at verse 27, "After them the Tekoites repaired another piece." The other Tekoites finished their work and then found more to do. We should never let people like the Tekoite nobles discourage us either.

Verse 23 tells about a man who "repaired by his house." We see the same or similar phrase three other times (vv. 10,28,29). This shows us how smart Nehemiah was. He knew if he could get a man involved in a project that involved and benefited his family, he would have a worker. Many of the workers were working right where they lived. They just got up, went outside, and started building on the wall. That's where we ought to start building for Jesus, right in our own home.

Reflection Connection

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-25 and discuss why it is important for there to be unity among Christians today.



III. Spiritual Illumination (vv. 1-32)

There were 12 gates around the city of Jerusalem, and 10 of them are mentioned in this third chapter. We have to be careful not to go overboard and allegorize the Bible so we remove the literal meaning from the Scriptures. Yet, when we look at these gates we cannot escape the fact that there seems to be spiritual truth indicated in these gates. Let's "swing wide the gates" and consider their spiritual truths.

The first gate we are told about is the sheep gate (v. 2). It was where the priests would take the sacrificial animals and prepare them to be sacrificed. This gate represented the coming of Christ to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Spiritually it reminds us that eternal life is possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

Verse 3 tells us about the second gate, the fish gate. This was where the fishermen brought their fish to sell in the market in Jerusalem. No doubt, Jesus' disciples who were fisherman were familiar with the fish gate. Jesus had told these disciples, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). We want to keep the fish gate open in our lives. We want to be witnesses and fishers of men.

We read about the old gate in verse 6. Jeremiah 6:16 tells us,

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye will find rest for your souls ..." This reminds us of the importance of the "old" paths. We need to stay old-fashioned when it comes to the Gospel message. We want to stay on the old paths of the truths

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found in the Bible. The fourth gate is the valley gate (v. 13). It reminds us of the importance of humility before the Lord. Pride is always the great enemy of progress in our Christian lives.

The dung gate is the fifth gate (v. 14). That's where the garbage was carried out. They hauled the garbage out to the valley of Hinnom where it was burned. It reminds us of the importance of keeping our lives clean from the garbage of this world (cp. 2 Cor. 7:1). The sixth gate is the gate of the fountain (v. 15). This gate reminds us of the filling of the

Holy Spirit. It comes after the dung gate and the valley gate. As we humble ourselves and get all the filth out of our lives, then the blessed Holy Spirit can fill us.

Verse 26 tells us about the seventh gate, the water gate. The water gate reminds us of the Word of God. The Bible says, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according unto thy word" (Ps. 119:9). It also says the Lord will sanctify and cleanse the church by the washing of the water of the Word (cp. Eph. 5:26). It is interesting that all the other gates were repaired, but the water gate wasn't repaired. Why not? They didn't have to repair the water gate because it points us to the Word of God. And there is no imperfection in God's Word. Psalm 119: 89 reminds us, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven."

The eighth gate is the horse gate (v. 28). A donkey in the Bible was a symbol of peace, while the horse was a symbol of war. This gate reminds us we are in a spiritual war as Christians (cp. Eph. 6:10-17). We need to be on the offensive for Jesus Christ.

Verse 29 tells us about the east gate, the ninth gate. The east gate is the gate where the glory departed in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23) and where the glory would return (Ezek.



43:4). Many believe it was the east gate Jesus entered when He came down from the Mount of Olives and entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (cp. Matt. 21:10). The east gate reminds us of the truth that Jesus will return one day (cp. Matt. 24:27).

The tenth gate is the gate miphkad (v. 31). Miphkad means

“the place of appointment.” It’s where controversies were settled. It’s also where the troops were brought to be reviewed. It is a reminder to us that we are going to stand before Jesus and be examined one day. Are we ready to stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

Reflection Connection:

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and discuss how many believers take this verse seriously. Why or why not?

Wrap Up

After taking us around the entire wall of Jerusalem and the ten gates, Nehemiah brings us right back to the beginning, the sheep gate (v. 32). This reminds us that life begins and ends with Jesus. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (cp. John 1:29). Every day we should thank Him for the gift of our salvation.

We also want to remember that one day we will give an account of our lives to Him (cp. Rom. 14:12). What will His record reveal about us? Let’s not be like the nobles who “put not their necks to the work of their Lord” but like the Tekoites who “repaired another piece.”

