

NEHEMIAH'S CO-WORKERS (Neh. 3:1-32)

Nehemiah is in Jerusalem. He has been sent by King Artaxerxes from Babylon to survey the ruins and to commence the work of rebuilding. He has managed to achieve the favour and support of the Jewish rulers, while at the same time, he has attracted the chagrin (annoyance, dismay, annoyance, irritation) of the opposition, led by Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian ...

Let's have a brief look at these three enemies of Judah ... Sanballat is not a Jewish name, instead, it comes from a similarly-sounding Assyrian name, - 'Sinballidh', - which means 'sin has vivified' ('given life to', i.e. glorifying sin) ... Sanballat came from a part of the country which had been invaded over 275 years earlier by the Assyrians, who intermarried the local Jewish girls and violated the race ... He was a Samaritan, a sworn adversary of the people of Jerusalem and Judah. He is described as a 'Horonite', which indicates he came from a town about twelve miles to the north of Jerusalem called Beth-horon, - 'beth', 'house'; 'horon' comes from the name of an Egyptian-Canaanite idol believed to be the co-ruler of the underworld. ... That was *his* pedigree!

The second outspoken enemy of Judah was Tobiah the Ammonite, from the east of the Jordan river. His name means "Jehovah is good", and he is described as "Tobiah, *the* servant". He originally came from a lowly background but 'worked his way' into favour with some of the well-known in the Jerusalem society ... Indeed, he had influential contacts with the priests in Jerusalem for his son Johanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah (Neh. 6:18; 12:22,23). Tobiah, himself, was the son-in-law of another priest called Shechaniah (Neh. 6:18). ... He was also an Ammonite ... and the hatred of the Jews by the Ammonites went back to the times when the Hebrews occupied the Promised Land, driving out the Horonites. ... 'Old sores run deep'!

The third enemy mentioned was Geshem (Gashmu, 'rain'). He was an Arabian who came from the countryside to the south of Jerusalem. He would have been an Arab leader, from the desert.

So, there was this three-pronged enemy coalition, - one coming from the north of Jerusalem, another from the east, and another from the south, - ... and they became infatuated with disrupting Nehemiah's work. ... It's good to know who your enemies are ... and it is good to build the walls to keep them out!

On the other side were the men and their families who committed themselves to working with Nehemiah for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. At first glance, chapter three contains a list of names ... and some readers 'skip over' this passage. However, as we carry out a brief study, I hope you will be encouraged as we take a glance at some of these workers.

To begin with ... These workers came from very divergent groups within Jerusalem, and the surrounding area. Nonetheless, they were labouring together towards the same goal. Doubtless, they had their quarrels and differences. Some were better off than others. Some held official posts in the city. Some were poor and some were rich. They were a mixture of different abilities and skills. But while they were different, they were the same when it came to their love for God and for Jerusalem. And when the time arrived for rebuilding the walls, they stood together with one heart and will. ... Notice how Nehemiah emphasises how close each of the work parties were, ² And next unto him (v.4,5,7, etc), - they *had* to work side-by-side, but they kept to their own responsibilities and did their own jobs ... taking care of their own business. It is a beautiful picture of God's people working together for the same goal, putting aside any differences, standing next to each other, and concentrating on *building the wall*.

The first name mentioned was Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests (v.1). They started the work, beginning with the sheep gate through which the sheep and the cattle would be herded into the temple to be sacrificed, i.e. the second temple, completed by Zerubbabel seventy years earlier. Eliashib and his priests built this section of the wall next to the temple for that was their priority. And when they had built the sheep gate, they *sanctified* it (v.1) for it was how the people entered bringing their offerings.

The next to be mentioned are some of the people who lived outside Jerusalem, - Jews from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah (v.2,5,7). ... That's encouraging too because the work was not dependent on a 'wee few' from a localised area. Instead, the work was spread out for as many of the people whose hearts were in it ... and these Jews from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah also longed to see the glory and honour of God restored to Jerusalem ... That is why they helped. Even though they did not live in the city, they were at one with those who did so that God's temple and God's people would be secure. ... These Jews from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah were willing to travel, and to leave their own homes, their own fields, and go into the city to work alongside their brethren ... serving the Lord together, not out of convenience, but out of commitment to His name and His cause.

The work *was* intense, - v.6b, they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. There were goldsmiths (v.8,32) building the wall, and chemists (v.8), and even many of the rulers (v.9,12,14,15,16, etc). They repaired the wall beside the Pool of Siloam and beside King David's tomb (v. 15,16; cf. Jn. 9:7) ... And the Levites are mentioned (v.17), and *more* rulers (v.17,18) ... and there's even an armoury just next to the wall (v.19)! ... And Baruch, he *earnestly/zealously* repaired his part of the wall (v.20) ... and on and on it went, - God's people together faithfully repairing the defences of their beloved city!

That is what we are needing today for Satan is so busy pulling down what faithful servants of God have built in the past. We need to remember this is God's house, where He has promised the gates of Hell will not prevail ... and yet, look around us and see how the Church in our country is in tatters, defenceless ... It is time to build again what has been torn down!

To accomplish His purpose, God did not send an army of angels, or renowned builders from Tyre and Sidon, ... Instead, He chose for the work to be done by His own people, who were already there, whose city it was, led by an individual who was a winetaster!

Undoubtedly, other professional builders would have been more able to decorate the walls with beautiful sculptures and fancy tapestries, but God did not want 'outsiders' to do the job ... He simply wanted His own people to have the yearning within their own hearts, to 'roll up their sleeves', and with the sweat on their brow, do the work He brought them back from Babylon to do!

The whole distance around the city was busy. You can hear the workers cutting and shaping the blocks and putting them into place. You can hear the workers calling to each other ... and gradually, the wall was at last coming into shape again, - the first time for over 140 years ... since away back when their grandparents and great-grandparents were in the city. All types of skilled craftsmen ... and even some with no building skills, - they weren't afraid to get their hands dirty, or cut themselves! It is a real testimony to how faithful these ancient people were in the renovation of their city walls!

There's always a downside, however ... but we'll not linger with it too long. We have to mention it though. even in a beautiful story like this ... The people from Tekoa were great workers. They had travelled about twelve miles over the

Judean hills to come to Jerusalem, - twelve miles there, and twelve miles back, and working in between. ... Lovely and sincere people, but look at this, ⁵ And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; *but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.* ... You always get them, - those who want the benefits, but who won't share in the work! ... They were 'too good' to get their hands dirty ... They considered it the job of others to do the back-breaking work! ... Let's just leave it there though, because, generally, these people of Tekoa were excellent people. In fact, we read about them building in v. 8 and then again in v.27, After them the Tekoites repaired *another* piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. ... We mustn't give them a bad name because of the poor reputation of some! The people of Tekoa are to be highly commended. ... And also, other workers faithfully 'made up' for the apathy of the nobles of Tekoa for we see Eliashib and his priests doing extra work in v.1,28, Meshullam (v.4,30), Meremoth (v.4,21).

... The work involved all these men of Jerusalem, Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, and Mizpah ... including priests, rulers, goldsmiths, pharmacists ... but also look at v.12, And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, *he and his daughters* ... Even the women were involved in the building of the wall! Families were involved, and nobody who was willing was left out!

It's a beautiful chapter, and I don't think it's necessary to say anything more about it, - it says enough for itself. ... So, let's pray.