

NEHEMIAH'S ENDURANCE (Neh. 4:1-6)

I wonder if you did much thinking about our study last Sunday morning, - about the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem? In one way, chapter three is quite detailed, and yet in another way, it's not. There were many names mentioned but there was even more *not* mentioned. For example, there was Eliashib the high priest ... with his brethren the priests (3:1) ... How many priests were helping him? We don't know. Was there ten, twenty, thirty, forty, *more*? We simply don't know for all we are told is, Eliashib the high priest ... with his brethren the priests. ... It is like in the local church. Often, there are the usual names in the foreground, but in reality, there are *many* people working tirelessly behind the scenes.

And as you continue through the chapter you discover all kinds of disparate groups working together for the single purpose of rebuilding the defences of Jerusalem. ... Ordinarily, their paths wouldn't have crossed and yet, such was the coordination of how they all worked together on this mammoth task ... it was amazing what they got done! After all, look at the different types of people alongside each other, for example, what did priests know about building a wall!

There were also the nobles who usually, when they needed something done, they would hire a band of workers, - they normally wouldn't have become involved in such a lowly task ... And to be honest, the nobles of the Tekoites, who refused 'to get their hands dirty' (v.5), resemble the 'normal' type of nobles. Real work wasn't for them ... that's what the ordinary minions were for!

Amazingly though, many of the nobles *did* play their part in building sections of the wall because they realised the work of rebuilding Jerusalem wasn't just for a few who 'felt like it', but it was for every able-bodied Jew in the city ... even the *daughters* of one of the rulers (v.12). ... Even *goldsmiths* (v.8,31) picked up a shovel and a trowel, and they would have known little, if anything, about wall-building or gate-hanging. They were more used to working with small delicate instruments to carve out expensive jewelry!

... And the apothecaries (v.8) ... Could you see them getting their hands dirty?! ... They normally worked with perfumes and scented oils ... *nothing* at all to do with lifting heavy blocks and breaking them down into bricks for fixing them into place in the mighty wall of defence! ... Many of the people building the wall were totally out of their comfort zones and areas of expertise ... and *still* they did the work for Jerusalem the Lord laid upon their hearts for them to do.

It's interesting how none of the workers said, "Oh, I couldn't do that. I couldn't build a wall. I've never built a wall in my life" ... But none of them said that. The wall was needing to be built, so they had to learn and *do it*. Granted, there were those vain nobles of Tekoa but it's not that they *couldn't* build a part of the wall, they *wouldn't*! It wasn't because they had arthritis or rheumatism ... but it was because they were far too good to be doing a meagre task like that! ... And they flatly refused to take part. ... It wasn't their type of job. They were 'too good' to do it! They would have gotten their lovely clothes covered in muck and dirt! ... But what, instead, would they have been doing? They would have been standing back watching and if the wall wasn't as straight as they would want it, or a wrong piece of clay put in the wrong place, or something else which they didn't like ... they would have pointed out to you and everyone else you all your mistakes and faults, but they would not have lifted a finger to help!

Instead, what must it have been like for those hard-working men of Tekoa who travelled from twelve miles outside the city to come in and work hard to build the wall of Jerusalem while their nobles gave them no encouragement whatsoever! ... While their nobles were an embarrassment, the ordinary men of Tekoa were a credit to their tribe!

In fact, everyone who took part in the rebuilding of that wall was a credit to their people because it was a work which would restore honour and bring security. It was a restoration of the peoples' dignity as they re-established the glory of God's name in Jerusalem ... And it is interesting the way God records the rebuilding of the wall for He describes it in an anti-clockwise, - He started at the left-hand side and worked back round towards the right ... It would have been more in keeping with normal construction practice if He had started the other way round! ... But He started with the entrance next to the temple so that first and foremost the people would begin by coming through the gate and into His presence ... He was to take the priority from the commencement of the restoration of this wall! ... He was to be put first!

So, starting the work off at the sheep gate (v.1), and the wall turning round to the left ... and next came the 'fish gate' (v.3), near where the fish market was. It would have been smelly. To the south of the fish gate was the 'old gate' (v.6) which would most likely have been one of the original entrances into the city, with all its old memories and customs.

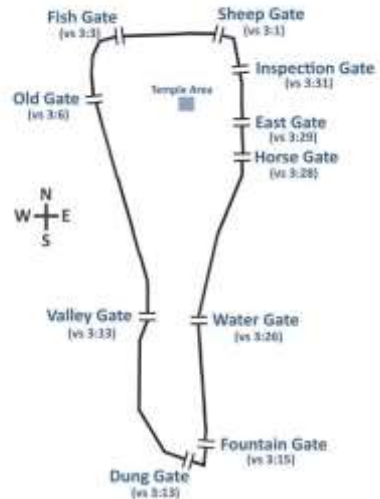
The sheep gate, the fish gate, the old gate ... and the parts of the wall in-between. Next came the 'valley gate' which opened out to the valley of Hinnom (v.13), or *Gehenna*. That's where some of the kings of Judah, - given to idolatry, - had sacrificed their children by fire to foreign gods (Jer. 7:31; 19:2-6). That part of the wall looked out across an area with terrifying memories ... and yet, the wall and the gate had to be restored there too. ... Going round a little further was another unattractive part of the wall, the 'dung gate' (v.14). That is where the refuse and rubbish was taken out through, and down to the valley of Hinnom to be burned. ... It would have been absolutely putrid! It would definitely not have been an appealing area for anyone to work in and yet, the work of repairing it needed to be done, - somebody had to do it, - ... and it was carried out by one of the rulers ... and he took no shortcuts or made no detours. He kept to the work and did what needed to be done ... and he did it to the same high standard as all the other builders, he set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof (v.14, cf. v.3,6,13,15). ... The fact it was a *dung* gate made no difference for it required the same amount of work and commitment as every other gate.

With the exception of the nobles of Tekoa, there wasn't a single gripe for everybody knew what to do, and they got on with it!

Then look and see what the next gate is ... the next gate on from the dung gate was the *fountain gate*' (v.15). It is near the pool of Siloam, and was the place the people went for washing ... What a contrast to the previous gate! Right next to the filth was the fountain for cleansing ... a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 13:1).

The next gate was the 'water gate' (v.26), - we're getting away from the filth and the stench ... and along the next stretch of the wall-building, the 'water gate led down to the Gihon Spring adjacent to the Kidron Valley. The next gate, just over half-ways on the eastern side of the wall, was the 'horse gate' (v.28) which

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was close to the king's stables ... a very distinguished part of the wall. The eastern gate looked over to the Mount of Olives (v.29).

The sheep gate, the fish gate, the old gate, the valley gate, the dung gate, the fountain gate, the water gate, the horse gate, the eastern gate ... and finally the gate known as *Miphkad* (v.31). It was a military gate where the soldiers mustered for inspection before parade or a military campaign.

And all these gates, and the walls in-between had to be carefully repaired and restored. It took fifty-two days of unrelenting labour to accomplish (Neh. 6:15). ... It also took a strong faith to believe it could be done ... after the rubble had lain in ruins for over 140 years. It took careful planning and a willingness to work alongside each other. ... There was no such thing as "You should have done it this way", or "If I did it, I would have done it like this" ... Each group concentrated on their part of the wall, in concert with everybody else doing *their* part. Everyone was involved, except those nobles from Tekoa.

And then when we begin the next chapter, we meet people on the outside who had nothing but contempt and derision for the building project. They *wallowed* in Jerusalem's misery! They never wanted to see the city restored ... and Sanballat and his cronies belonged to an always unsuccessful line of rascals who oppose Jerusalem at every juncture, it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we build the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews (4:1). ... He was 'boiling' with anger, he was livid! ... The enemy hates to see God's people at work, and they had nothing but contempt and loathsomeness!

It is no different in these modern times when the enemy patronisingly smiles at you, and pretends they are at one with you ... when really, what they want to do is shut down every Bible-believing church! Be under no illusion, the devil wants to see this church closed ... He'll have his 'nobles of Tekoa' on the inside trying to hinder and discourage, - picking fault instead of helping ... and he will have his 'Sanballats' on the outside whose one goal is to finish the work in this place. ... How many have we seen depart because they did not get their own way, and they weren't prepared to accept anyone else's plans but their own!

And Sanballat yearned to see Jerusalem fall. He didn't want to see the city being rebuilt. Instead, he wanted to see it turned into a field, a place of 'has-been' ... finished, done, dead ... and that is what Satan wants to see for this place too! He wants to see the demise of every Bible-believing fellowship so that he could

ply his evil and rid the land of God, I will ascend ..., I will exalt ... I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation ... I will ascend above the heights ... *I will be like the most High* (Is. 14:13,14).

And look at Sanballat ... he was ‘wroth’, - he was ‘fuming’, ‘spitting fire’! He wasn’t ‘a little bit’ annoyed, but he was greatly enraged! ... How did he cope with it? He mocked the Jews. ... That’s what the world does when it doesn’t know how to get rid of God ... Thomas Jefferson, “The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus ... will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerve in the brain of Jupiter”. Voltaire, “Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd ... religion that has ever infected the world” ... Sanballat has had a myriad of protégés throughout every generation, with their blatant opposition to and contempt for God and His people! ... That is the reason to build the wall for if it’s not there, the enemy can sweep in far too easily!

Outside the walls Sanballat, though, was throwing every insult he could think of ... He called them ‘feeble Jews’ ... Call them what you like, Sanballat, but the Jews finished their wall and you couldn’t stop them! ... Alongside Sanballat was Tobiah who was always trying to impress for he came from out of the gutter of society, - a ‘servant’ (2:10). As we say, his mouth would drive off before he put his brain in gear, and he, - the gormless idiot he was, - tried to pitch in with his ‘tuppence-worth’, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall (Neh. 4:3 ... like Laurel and Hardy).

Immediately, Nehemiah took the situation straight to the Lord, ^{4:4} Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: ⁵ And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. ... The hymnwriter wrote, “When your enemies assail and your heart begins to fail, *Don’t forget that God in Heaven answers prayer; He will make a way for you and will lead you safely through – Take your burden to the Lord and leave it there*”.

When the Lord begins a work, He will not leave it ‘half-done’ but will complete it. I believe He can still do a work in our fellowship. If we please Him, we will know His good pleasure, and I believe He can restore the work and witness. ... He did not give up on Jerusalem ... but His people had *not* to give up on Him. ... Read v.6 carefully ... So built *we* the wall ... they all worked together for that was their goal. Here is the question though, was the wall completely finished? Was the work done and finished? No, not yet, read it again, and all

the wall was joined together *unto the half thereof*... It wasn't finished yet ... there was still more to do ... but what a start! ... This was the third attempt, - it wasn't done under Zerubbabel or Ezra, but God, - in His own time, - raised up Nehemiah, and the work was well underway.

May the Lord be gracious towards us and may this be the time when He rescues and re-establishes His work here in this place! Amen.