

## NEHEMIAH 3: A LIST OF NAMES?

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In Nehemiah 1, we find the leader with a burden when he hears that the walls of Jerusalem are in ruin. This chapter tells of Nehemiah's earnest prayer to the God of heaven on behalf of the people living in the ruined capital city with burning gates. His burden is noticed by the king, his boldness extends to petitioning that king for help, his plan is blessed by the heavenly God and the earthly king.

Nehemiah Chapter 2 finds the leader in Jerusalem discerning the reality of the destruction and the urgency of the problem. He researches, he prepares, he plans, and then he casts his vision to the people. The chapter ends with the people shouting in one voice the cry of action and demonstrating their commitment by picking up the bricks of restoration.

Chapter 3 is an incredible chapter, but don't attempt to read it in public unless your love to pronounce name after name of the Jewish builders. All 32 verses contain the account of the personal engagement of individuals in the rebuilding of the walls. The names do not mean much to me, but some of the details of the people are fascinating. Keep in mind as we look at the specific details that the entire chapter projects the need for community, the essential aspect of unity, and the combined effort of all the individuals to reach the goal.

The first individual mentioned in chapter 3 is Eliashib, who just happens to be the high priest. My mental picture of the high priest is that of a pious, distinguished, rabbi-type man dressed in a flowing robe with a turban on his head attached with the message, "Holy unto the Lord." The high priest is the central spiritual figure in the life of Jerusalem. His position demanded respect and his authority in spiritual matters set the tone for the nation. But here, we see the high priest rolling up his sleeves, putting on his jeans, and getting his hands dirty with the work of rebuilding. It is not a coincidence that he is listed first, for rebuilding the walls of the city was primarily a spiritual activity; it required a serious commitment to God; and it demanded a sacrifice greater than the animals offered in the temple.

From the high priest we move to the general population. In verse 3 and again in verse 5 specific names are not mentioned – just the men of Jericho and the men of Tekoa. I find the men of Tekoa especially interesting for two reasons. First, their group involves the only negative statement in this chapter, "The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors." The men were willing but their leadership was not. Second, not only did the men of Tekoa build one section but they rebuilt a second section as recorded in verse 27. Bravo for these men willing to ignore their nobles and go the second mile in the reconstruction project.

I love some of the professions that are mentioned in this chapter, often working side by side to bring restoration to the city. You can find the goldsmiths in verses 8, 31, and 32. These craftsmen are artists who are using their talented hands to lay brick; their gifted hands, that are their source of livelihood, are now being cut and bruised by the rocks of repair. Notice that the perfume-makers (v. 8) are right beside their artist friends. These chemists-salesmen would most likely be way out of their skill set, but none-the-less they are laboring with all the rest. Merchants (v. 32) are listed as well as participants. The business men and shop owners have joined the workforce with a shared vision of raising the walls of the city.

This effort was a trickle-down effort as well. The rulers (v 9-19) shouldered personal responsibility in the effort. It was not air-conditioned offices and supervisory assignments for the leader – no they were working side by side with the merchants and the artists. I really like the ruler mentioned in verse 12; Shallum included his daughters in the rebuilding process. Talk about a family activity that will be remembered for a lifetime – those girls had the opportunity to participate in a nationwide effort to restore the spiritual history of their country.

Not everyone did the same amount of work. Some did more than others, but countless people were involved. Some repaired 500 yards of the wall (v. 13)



while some concentrated on the wall right in front of their houses (v. 28). Some built out of obligation while Baruch zealously repaired his section (v. 20) - I would have loved to have seen him work. I can imagine the inspiration and encouragement Baruch must have been to those around him.

As I read this chapter over a couple of times, I suddenly realized that Nehemiah is not mentioned as a participant in the process. Could it be that this great leader was resting under an olive tree while the people worked? Maybe he was standing lookout and protecting the people from the threats of the enemy. But no...Chapter 5:16 reads, "I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work." Nehemiah and his men were in the thick of of the masonry adventure.

The results of all this community effort? Chapter 4 verse 6: "So we rebuilt the wall till it reached half its height for the people worked with all their heart." The work had begun. In fact, the work was half way to completion. But what I love about this verse is the reason for the success – for the people worked with all their heart. Motivation, commitment, and inspiration can accomplish great things when they are combined with unity of purpose and a shared vision. From the leader to the high priest to the artist to the youth of the community, this group of people demonstrated strength of purpose, powerful determination and resolve, and a collaborative support to accomplished amazing results. There are lots of good lessons to apply from this chapter of names.