

Lesson 3  
**Dividing the Work in Sections;  
Building the Walls Simultaneously  
in Unity**  
**(Nehemiah 3:1-32)**

**I. Scripture Reading**

Nehemiah 3:1-32

**II. Synopsis**

**1. Reconstruction in Sections**

By now, the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed for more than one hundred and forty years since the city was captured by the Babylonian army in 586 B.C. Nehemiah was not only a God-fearing man, but one who understood God's plan for His people and was willing to act on

**\* Closing Prayer: \***

Dear Heavenly Father, you are the Lord in charge of all the circumstances around us. May your gracious hand be with us and give us strength to face opposition and fulfill your calling in our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

it. During the entire process of rebuilding the city wall, we see Nehemiah as an extraordinary leader. He received support from the Israelites and led them to work together to complete the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. Despite his leadership role, Nehemiah did not take sole credit for completing the project. On the contrary, he generously gave credit to all who participated in this work, citing their names and the individual contributions to the rebuilding.

In Nehemiah 3, the broken walls were divided into forty-five sections. The rebuilding work began in a counter-clockwise manner, starting from the northeastern corner of the Sheep Gate. Nehemiah recorded the names of the workers, their families or their hometowns, and occasionally also provided details of each family's contributions to the construction. Nehemiah documented the names of the ten gates and described how they laid the beams and set up the doors, bolts, and bars. Even if readers may not be into all the construction details (e.g., names of the family, places, and the various gates), this chapter is still a very important piece of history recorded in the Old Testament. Although the names of some places have not been precisely determined geographically, it has still been useful to show the landscape of the city of Jerusalem walls during the Persian Empire. Today, archaeologists continue to study the Book of Nehemiah and have gradually exca-

vated more ruins from the ancient city walls of Jerusalem. Some of the ruins have proven to be part of the east city wall in Nehemiah's time. Being about 5 meters thick and much higher than the old city walls, it was quite a massive rebuilding project.

As recorded later in Nehemiah 6:15, the wall was completed in the month of Elul. "Elul" is the sixth month in the Jewish calendar. It spans August and September in the Gregorian calendar. It means that the wall was built from about late July to mid-September of the Gregorian calendar. In the Mediterranean climate zone, summers in Jerusalem are dry, with the sun in full blast every day from a cloudless sky. Outdoor temperatures can be as high as 40 degrees Celsius or even higher. One can imagine how difficult and torturing the construction work was.

Following Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem from Susa, he quickly designed a plan for completing the wall-rebuilding project. He appointed supervisors for each section of the wall. He also carefully monitored the progress of each segment, dispatched construction materials and the workers' food supplies, and coordinated other logistics. Even though his brother Hanani might have made some helpful preparation in advance of Nehemiah's return, Nehemiah was clearly very decisive and efficient in implementing this project. Although the entire construction project involved more than forty separate segments,

all of them were built simultaneously. Even though, from today's standpoint, Nehemiah had to coordinate complex logistics and personnel deployment, Nehemiah was able to lead his people to work together in an orderly and systematic fashion to complete the construction of the wall in a very short amount of time. His outstanding management abilities were indeed commendable.

## **2. Construction of the Northern and Western Walls (3:1-15)**

The recording of the construction project began when the high priest Eliashib initiated his work with his fellow priests to rebuild the wall starting at the northeastern corner of the Sheep Gate, and continued as far as the Tower of Hananel. There was special meaning for Nehemiah to start the whole construction project from Sheep Gate until the Tower of Hananel, the entrance to the Temple, because it fulfilled God's promise in Jeremiah 31:38, "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when the city shall be rebuilt for the Lord from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate". Nehemiah 3:1 further records that the Israelites "consecrated it (the Sheep Gate) and set up its doors; they consecrated it ...as far as the Tower of Hananel." The Sheep Gate was a symbol of man's repentance and the desire to bring sacrifice to God. During the rebuilding of the Tower of Hananel, the grace of God's

forgiveness was confirmed and His promise to Israel was fulfilled. Clearly, reconstructing the walls was not only a civil engineering endeavor, but also represented a renewal of promise and restoration of covenant between the Israelites and their God. The Sheep Gate marks both the beginning and the end of the project. When the high priest consecrated the "gate" and set up its doors, it represented Israelites intent to "sanctify" each and every section of the walls and gates as an offering to God.

While recording the reconstruction of the walls, Nehemiah made frequent references to those who were involved in the project. For example, the "son of ... made repairs / built / set up ...". Therefore, it is obvious that he wanted the readers to understand how everyone was working together as a team and that the rebuilding project was a joint effort. The old and young, men and women, all came out, united with the same goal in mind, which is to rebuild the wall and gates. They came from all walks of life and backgrounds; there were goldsmiths, perfume makers, etc. (v.8). They originated from different villages, some from remote areas while others from the peripheral areas of Jerusalem. Depending on the extent of damage to the walls, some sections could be repaired, whereas other sections had to be completely rebuilt. The work chronicled in Nehemiah Chapter 3 was precisely the display of the people's response articulated in Nehemiah 2:18 where

they cried out, “Let us start building!”

While all the people gathered to work in unity, a negative scene arose in Nehemiah 3:5. “Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.” Tekoa was home to the prophet Amos and governed by Geshem the Arab (2:19) during this time. We do not know if the nobles were afraid of Geshem and thus refused to participate in the construction of the wall. What we do see is that Nehemiah did not conceal the fact that a small group of people were not willing to cooperate with him, and he truthfully recorded these facts.

### **3. Construction of the Eastern Wall (3:16-32)**

Beginning in Nehemiah 3:16, the reconstruction of the city wall began toward the west, turning south, then toward the east. According to Nehemiah 2:13-14, the eastern section of the wall “had been broken down, and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. . . .there was no place for the animal I was riding to continue.” However, Nehemiah was determined to rebuild the walls and did not give up. Therefore, he built on top of the stone wall that was built by the Jebusites to stabilize the eastern slopes of the city wall (using a stepped-stone structure). From aerial photographs of the Jerusalem walls today, one can still see

the ruins of a 30-meter long city wall located on the eastern side of the City of David at the northeastern corner of the Jerusalem Walls National Park. After much archaeological research, it was confirmed (and reported in 2007) that the wall was indeed built by Nehemiah.

In Nehemiah 3:16-32, the recording of the construction took a different form than that in the first half of Chapter 3. In the first half of the chapter, the emphasis was on the sections of the wall and gates being rebuilt. In contrast, the second half of Chapter 3 focused on the construction of residential houses, jurisdictions, and landmark buildings. Even at the old city area of Jerusalem today, it is common to see people building their houses against the city walls. We can see that Nehemiah had wisdom from God when he arranged for the families to be responsible to “repair opposite and/or beside their own house.” Thus, the wall that they were responsible for repairing was also the front of their own homes. This not only saved them time getting to and from work, it also gave them a greater sense of security. Nehemiah’s arrangement indeed allowed for a win-win situation.

Among the people working on the construction project were the priests Eliashib, Meremoth, Meshullam, and Hananiah. However, Baruch, the son of Zabbai, was the only one praised by Nehemiah for “zealously repairing” the city wall (3:20 NIV). Baruch did not have any high or

special status, unlike the high priest Eliashib, but his dedication was noticed and recorded by Nehemiah in Old Testament history. Rebuilding the walls was not only an effort of protecting the people of Jerusalem. More significantly, it also symbolized the restoration of relationship between God and His chosen people.

Again and again in Israel's history, "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" and the Lord strengthened their enemies to oppress and humiliate them. Repairing the walls and gates was as important as rebuilding the Temple because it brought the Israelites into spiritual revival and a new era of restored relationship with God.

### III. Video Viewing

Play DVD section "Divide the Work in Sections; Build the Walls Simultaneously in Unity".

### IV. Study Questions

#### 1. Fill in the blanks

- (1) Then the high priest \_\_\_\_\_ set out to work with his fellow priests and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set up its doors; they consecrated it as far

as the Tower of the Hundred and as far as the Tower of \_\_\_\_\_ . (Nehemiah 3:1)

- (2) Nehemiah built on top of the stone wall which was built around 1200-1000 B.C. by the \_\_\_\_\_ , to stabilize the eastern slopes of the city wall (using a stepped-stone structure), and to support their castles and palaces. In II Samuel, I Kings and I & II Chronicles, It was called " \_\_\_\_\_ ", meaning stabilizing the stone structure of the slope.
- (3) In Nehemiah 3:8, there were goldsmiths and perfume-makers involved with the "restored Jerusalem as far as the \_\_\_\_\_ ." According to archaeological data, the "Broad Wall" was about 7 meters thick. The entire section of the "Broad Wall" was originally built by \_\_\_\_\_ of the Southern Kingdom (II Chronicles 32:5). Since this area was relatively flat, the city of Jerusalem could be defeated easily by enemies with battering rams, so they tried to make the walls thicker, and thus named it the "Broad Wall".
- (4) In Nehemiah 3:16, the Nehemiah mentioned there was not the author of the Book of Nehemiah. He was the son of \_\_\_\_\_ , ruler of the district of \_\_\_\_\_ , located in between Jerusalem and Hebron.

#### 2. Scripture Study

- (1) From the Bible, find the background of Eliashib, the

high priest.

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(2) During the time of Nehemiah’s rebuilding, there were ten gates at the Jerusalem City Walls. Find the names of the gates in Nehemiah 3.

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(3) Among the people rebuilding the walls, Nehemiah assigned each group of people to be responsible for constructing one segment. Occasionally, however a few of them were put in charge of building more than one seg-

ment. Who were they?

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### 3. Discussion and Sharing

(1) Nehemiah repaired the walls starting from the Sheep Gate and the Tower of Hananel. Based on Jeremiah 31:38-40 and John 10:7-9, what is the significance of the Sheep Gate and the Tower of Hananel?

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(2) Nehemiah recorded detailed information about each person who participated in repairing the walls. Is any of them inspiring to you?

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(3) The people who built and reconstructed the walls of Jerusalem came from different hometowns and walks of life, including the young and old, male and female. As a Christian, how do you feel about this kind of collaboration?

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This part supplies reference for group leaders and Sunday school teachers. If needed, please refer to Appendix: “Instruction for Bible Study Group Leaders and Instructors”. Please feel free to adjust the process according to time limits.

**A. Preparation (5-15 minutes)**

**1. Icebreaker**

Play this icebreaking Game: “Counting the Stars”.

Preparation: The leader prepares a few projector slides with randomly arranged shapes (square, circle, triangle, and star) in black or white on each slide. For example:

Slide 1	Slide 2	Slide 3	Slide 4
●★☆☆●▲	★■★●▲	▲■★▲●	■★●▲★
▲■■★▲	★●▲●★	★■●▲★	▲■★■▲
★■▲●▲	▲■★■▲	■★■▲★	★■▲★■
★▲★●■	★■▲★▲	★■●▲●	●★★■●

- A. The leader the class into two teams.
- B. The leader explains the rules of this game: The leader will display the slides, one at a time, to both teams for 3 seconds. Then the leader will cover the slide and ask questions, such as: how many white stars (or black triangles) are in the slide? The team that gets the correct answer first scores one point. At the end of the game, the team that scores more points is the winning team. The teacher gives each team one minute to get ready.
- C. Start the game by projecting the slide and asking questions, until the last slide is displayed. When the game is over, the leader asks the winning team to share their winning strategy.

## 2. Introduction

Unity gives strength to the team and can achieve greater things beyond what an individual can do alone. Let us observe how thoughtfully Nehemiah managed his team with proper assignments to each unit.

## 3. Opening Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as we get together and study your words, please be with us and bless us. May the Holy Spirit prepare our hearts and help us to understand your words. May you open our ears so that we

can know your will, follow your lead and be blessed by you. Please give us wisdom and strength through your words, so that we can live a life that is pleasing to you. We also want to seek after your heart and be a blessing to the people around us. We pray all these in Jesus' name. Amen.

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## B. Development (40-90 minutes)

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### I. Scripture Reading

Nehemiah 3:1-32.

### II. Synopsis

1. Reconstruction in Sections
2. Construction of the Northern and Western Walls (3:1-15)
3. Construction of the Eastern Wall (3:16-32)

### III. Video Viewing

Play DVD chapter “Divide the Work in Sections; Build the Walls Simultaneously in Unity”. Students watch the video and take notes.

### IV. Study Questions

Depending on the amount of time at hand, the leader

can pick some or all the following questions to ask students, and provide supplemental information and appropriate answers as necessary.

1. Fill in the blanks: Questions (1) – (4)
2. Scripture study: Questions (1) – (3)
3. Discussion and sharing: Questions (1) – (3)

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### C. Conclusion (5-15 minutes)

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#### 1. Summary

God's work is usually done collaboratively by many people. Nehemiah was burdened and saddened about the broken city walls of Jerusalem. He prayed day and night for the walls. God heard his prayers and used him to call the Jews from various walks of life to rebuild the city walls together. Since then, the history of the Israelites entered into a new era.

#### 2. Homework Assignment

After learning this lesson, please write down God's response to your prayers in the last two weeks and how God has moved you to take action concerning what you have prayed.

#### \* Closing Prayer: \*

Our dear Heavenly Father, we love to serve you as Nehemiah did. Please teach us not to give credit to ourselves, but humbly know that it is your hand that has achieved all things. We are so thankful that you have not only saved us, but have called us to be your co-workers in your master plan. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen!