

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 2:11 – 3:32.

Reread Nehemiah 2:11-20. Nehemiah in Jerusalem

After his long journey from Susa, Nehemiah has arrived in “the city where [his] fathers are buried” (2:3) to do what “God had put in [his] heart to do for Jerusalem” (2:12) – rebuild the city.

1. Three days (2:11) following his arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah begins his work. His first step is to assess the damage to Jerusalem's gates and walls and determine what it will take to rebuild them.
 - a. Nehemiah makes his inspection at night without telling anyone his purpose for being there (2:12, 16). Why do you think he is so cautious? (Consider 2:9-10.)

 - b. Take a look at the map of Jerusalem on the last page of this lesson to see the likely path Nehemiah took in his nighttime journey around the southernmost part of the city (2:13-15). Imagine for a moment the destruction Nehemiah might have seen through cover of darkness – the ruins of the thick stone walls, the charred remains of the city's gates, and the debris-strewn valleys below.

2. With his inspection complete and a plan in mind, Nehemiah finally speaks to his fellow Jews.
 - a. What reasons does he give for rebuilding? (2:17)

 - b. Why does he consider the Jews – including himself – to “be in disgrace” (2:17)? (Consider what Psalm 48:1-3 says about the city.)

3. Nehemiah holds the “genuine conviction” that the “gracious hand” (2:18a) of God is upon him and that God has called him² to this work. Given that the task ahead will be extremely difficult, why do you think the people respond to Nehemiah and his words in 2:17-18 with such overwhelming enthusiasm (2:18b)?

4. Once again Sanballat and Tobiah, along with Geshem the Arab, oppose Nehemiah. How does he respond to the ridicule of these foreign leaders? (2:20)

5. “By his great confidence and dependence on God for success, [Nehemiah] inspired the leaders and the people to a task they had considered beyond their abilities.”³ They may also have feared the same results as they had experienced in their previous attempt to rebuild (Ezra 4:23).
 - a. What gives Nehemiah this confidence? (Ps. 37:1-5; Pr. 16:3)
 - b. What does his example teach you about mobilizing and encouraging other believers when facing difficult tasks?

Read Nehemiah 3:1-32. The Work Begins

This chapter contains a list of “largely forgotten names and places”⁴ that we might be tempted to skip over in our reading of the book. But let’s take a close look at what’s hidden here – an amazing feat of organization, and the enthusiastic participation of very diverse people. (This chapter is also considered to be “one of the most important in the [Old Testament] for determining the topography of Jerusalem.”⁵ But we’ll leave that for another study!)

6. Take another look at the map of Jerusalem. Slowly read through chapter 3 again, but this time, follow along on the map as you go verse by verse, from gate to gate beginning at the Sheep Gate (top right) and moving counter-clockwise around the city. What are your immediate impressions of all that’s going on around Jerusalem?
7. Along with the forty-one designated section leaders whose names are mentioned, there are additional men (and women [3:12]) working side by side in groups based on family or hometown or occupation.
 - a. How does this arrangement encourage the people to persevere in their back-breaking labor?
 - b. Can you recall a time when you were a part of a difficult project or ministry in which your co-laborers encouraged you to persevere? Explain.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS

In chapter 3 there are listed by name **41** men from Jerusalem and **8** surrounding towns who are responsible for **42** sections of wall, each averaging **250** feet in length with one being **1,500** feet in length. There are **10** gates within the approximately **2 – 2-1/2** miles of wall which enclosed from **90 – 220** acres of land.⁶

“The destruction along the steep eastern slope of the city, overlooking the Kidron Valley, seems to have been so severe (cf. 2:14) that, for the sake of time, the wall was pulled back to a line higher up the slope... [As a] consequence [some] found themselves building beside their own houses (23-30).”⁷

8. The men of Tekoa, a small town not far from Jerusalem, pulled double duty, repairing two sections of wall (3:5, 27), but their nobles refused to help at all – they “disdained manual labor.”⁸ How might their refusal provide a caution to believers today? (Rom. 12:3)

9. Not all of the people working to rebuild the city walls are skilled stone masons or carpenters! Skim the chapter and jot down the various and diverse occupations that are mentioned. Do any seem particularly surprising to you? Why or why not?

10. How is the diversity of the workforce seen in this chapter a picture of the church in its grand kingdom-building mission? (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-13)

11. In his commentary on Nehemiah, James Boice points out that one name is missing from the list in chapter 3 – that of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah (Neh. 1:1). He writes, “He was as active as anyone, of course, even more so. We can be sure of that. But when it came to giving credit, he did not say, as Nebuchadnezzar, who had conquered Jerusalem more than 140 years earlier, said when looking out over his own city, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’ (Dan. 4:30). Nebuchadnezzar took glory for himself and was judged for it. By contrast, Nehemiah gave credit to others, listing what each had been assigned and what each had built. Then, when it was all over, he gave the ultimate glory to God, as he had done from the beginning. ‘This work had been done with the help of our God’... (Neh. 6:16).”⁹
As the Lord calls you to participate in kingdom-building work, may this be your response as well. Pray to that end.

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 83.

² H. G. M. Williamson, “Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition*, eds. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 433.

³ Edwin Yamauchi, “Ezra, Nehemiah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 691.

⁴ Kidner, 84.

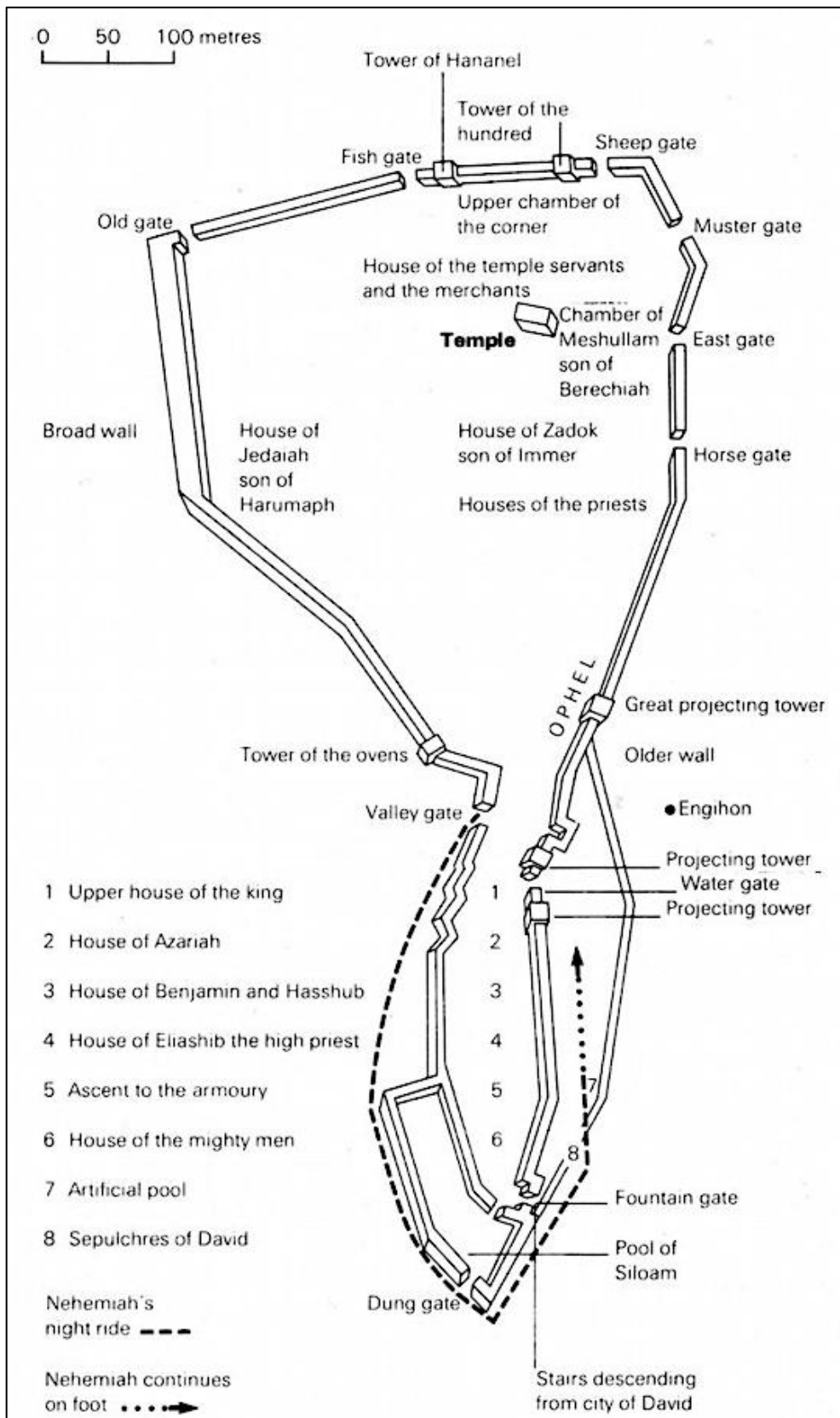
⁵ Yamauchi, 692.

⁶ The 8 surrounding towns are listed in Neh. 3 as follows: Jericho (3:2), Tekoa (3:5, 27), Gibeon (3:7), Mizpah (3:7, 15, 19), Zanoah (3:13), Beth Hakkerem (3:14), Beth Zur (3:16), Keilah (3:17, 18). “The towns listed as the homes of the builders seem to have represented the administrative centers of the Judean province” (Yamauchi, 692). All other statistics are from Yamauchi, 692-693.

⁷ Williamson, 434-435.

⁸ Yamauchi, 694.

⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: an Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 48.



“Nehemiah’s Jerusalem.... The site names are derived from Neh. 3:1-32, proceeding anti-clockwise from the Sheep Gate at the NE corner.”ⁱ

ⁱ Map and caption are from Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 85.