

Do Your Part

Nehemiah 3

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Introduction:

Attention: I used to coach this junior high basketball team and there was this one kid who loved to shoot he was the center but couldn't dribble but kept trying to bring it up the court.

Subject: If we are going to fix our community some of us need to start remembering our role and get our head in the game .It is a system or team that keeps the community and repairing the walls.

Scripture: Nehemiah 3

Background:

Nehemiah 3:1–7:4 describes the second important social process in community change (see comments on 2:17–18), the “community development process.” Tollefson notes that “Nehemiah skillfully divided the work force into some forty manageable work crews (3:1–32) organized by common interests and geography

Building the wall was part of the fulfillment of the word of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1) and its completion would mean the restoration of the holy city (11:1, 18), despite the incompleteness of that restoration due to the continuing sins of the people.

Despite its mundane appearance, this chapter is more than a construction record. Although the walls and gates would serve a military purpose (cf. Neh 4), the book's concern for separation from pagan influence suggests it also had symbolic significance (cf. 13:19–22). Rather than simply providing security, the walls encouraged in the people of God a sense of identity and distinctiveness. Their restoration also represented a reversal of the humiliation of defeat and destruction suffered because of Israel's sin (cf. 2:3, 17). Like the restored temple, the rebuilt walls would assure the Jews of God's redemptive presence among them.⁷¹¹ For the Christian, however, the continuing demonstration of God's powerful and loving presence is the cross (Rom 5:5–11).

Body:

I. Your Wall

- a. The Plan
 - i. This chapter shows Nehemiah was an outstanding organizer. Some forty-five sections of construction are mentioned, including ten gates. Planning all this building activity, organizing the groups, plus arranging the infrastructure to supply materials was no small accomplishment.
- b. The Places people in the right places 2 Timothy 2:2 Eph 4:11

¹⁷¹ McConville (*Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 88) explains that “the Lord was giving his people a badge, a further token—alongside the Temple—that they *were* his people.”

- i. “Nehemiah skillfully divided the work force into some forty manageable work crews (3:1–32) organized by common interests and geography
- ii. Moses and Jethro

II. Your Place v.1-2,8,9,22

- a. Doesn't matter your Previous Role v.17
 - i. High Priest and his brothers-The priests, even the high priest, did not just direct others, but they themselves “went to work”
 - 1. It probably was so named because sheep destined for sacrifice usually were brought in there to the market
 - ii. from rulers and temple personnel to merchants and citizens
 - iii. others by towns, crafts (e.g. the goldsmiths, and the perfumer of verse 8), trades (the merchants: 31f.) and callings (the priests: 1, 21f., 28; Levites: 17f.; temple servants: 26; district officers: 9, 12, 15–17).
- b. Doesn't matter Who
 - i. With their families
 - ii. The social organization also must have included many other guilds such as potters and bakers, who may have contributed to the building project by working at their trade.v.31
- c. Doesn't matter the Task v.20
 - i. It must have been a great honor for Baruch (whose name meant “blessed”) to have been commended for zeal by Nehemiah (v. 20)..His zeal for such “menial tasks” as building a wall for the Lord must have inspired those who worked with him
 - 1. Zealous – kindle with excitement.
 - 2. Whatever you put your hands to Colossians 3:17
- d. Doesn't Matter How Far- Traveled Distance v.22
 - i. Men of the valley
 - 1. many villages and outlying areas of Judah
 - 2. Even the people from the villages who lived a distance from Jerusalem also helped. They felt part of the community, even though they personally received fewer direct benefits
- e. The Nobles v.5
 - i. would not put their shoulders to the work” were influenced by or afraid of Amos. Whatever their reason, it indicates that some of the Jews did not support Nehemiah's plan.

III. Your Part

- a. The Work
 - i. Repaired to make firm or strong'. It does not necessarily mean restoring everything as before.
- b. They were working in portions v.2,4,7
 - i. meaning that these men finished one section and then worked on another. A number of men and groups are named as doing the same.

- ii. He assigned everyone a specific place to work. This coordination stands out in the phrases “next to him,” “next to them,” “next to that,” “the next section,” “beside him,” and “beyond them,” which occur 28 times in this chapter
- iii. Assignments were made near people’s houses (vv. 21, 23–24, 26, 28–30). Reasons for this plan are obvious.
 - 1. First, people who were assigned to sections of the wall near their homes would be more personally involved and consequently more highly motivated.
 - 2. Second, they would not have to travel to another part of the city to do the job, wasting valuable time.
 - 3. Third, in case of attack they would not be tempted to leave their posts, but would stay and protect their families.
 - 4. Fourth, the whole task would be a family effort, utilizing all available talent

IV. The Future

- a. The Church 1 Cor 12:14

Conclusion:

5. Building for Unity: The Community Rebuilds the Wall (3:1–32)

This chapter shows Nehemiah was an outstanding organizer. Some forty-five sections of construction are mentioned, including ten gates.⁴²² Planning all this building activity, organizing the groups, plus arranging the infrastructure to supply materials was no small accomplishment.

Nehemiah 3:1–7:4 describes the second important social process in community change (see comments on 2:17–18), the “community development process.” Tollefson notes that “Nehemiah skillfully divided the work force into some forty manageable work crews (3:1–32) organized by common interests and geography. The way Nehemiah confronted opposition both from without and from within and the way he organized the community were significant ingredients in the realization of his vision.”⁴³³

Chapter 3 contains one of the most detailed biblical descriptions of Jerusalem. Yet many of the exact locations cannot be identified with certainty today, for archaeologists have not discovered many remains in Jerusalem from the Persian period. Of course, it is hard to find sites to excavate in a city as populated as modern Jerusalem. K. Kenyon’s excavations on the eastern slope have shown that Nehemiah’s wall was farther up the side of the hill than the former wall had been. The wall she uncovered was about eight feet thick.⁴⁴⁴

The entire province of Judah was not very large. Aharoni and Avi-Yonah use the evidence from this chapter and from the places in which seal impressions from this time have been found to trace the boundaries of Judah. It reached from Jericho and Mizpah in the north to Beth-zur (just north of Hebron) and En-gedi in the south. In the northwest the province included Gezer, Lod, and extended as far as Ono, not far from Joppa.⁴⁵⁵

Some think this chapter was not originally written by Nehemiah because it is in third, rather than first, person. Also its point of view is postconstruction; it mentions the finishing touches of gates, bolts, and doors, which according to 6:1 and 7:1 were completed later. It may have been taken from temple archives. However, it is reasonable to assume that Nehemiah included it when he wrote his memoirs. Although it appears to be a complete description of the wall, it is possible that some descriptive details have dropped out or were omitted. This is suggested by the fact that in a number of cases where a man or group is said to have built “another section” (“a second section”), no first section has been mentioned.⁴⁶⁶

(1) Repairing the Northern and Western Walls (3:1–15)

⁴²² Gates are mentioned in vv. 1, 3, 6, 13–15, 26, 28–29, 31.

⁴³³ Tollefson, “Nehemiah, Model for Change Agents,” 115.

⁴⁴⁴ Kenyon, *Jerusalem*, 111.

⁴⁵⁵ Aharoni, *Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 109.

⁴⁶⁶ For example, where this phrase appears in vv. 11, 19–20, 30 there are no antecedents, but those of vv. 21, 24, 27 have their antecedents in vv. 4, 18, and 5, respectively. See comments on v. 11.

3:1 “Eliashib” was the grandson of Jeshua (Neh 12:10), the leader in the time of the construction of the temple. The priests, even the high priest, did not just direct others, but they themselves “went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate.” The Sheep Gate (cf. John 5:2) was near the northeast corner of the wall and near the temple area. It probably was so named because sheep destined for sacrifice usually were brought in there to the market.

There were two towers on the north wall since this was the only side not naturally defended by a steep hill. The “Tower of Hananel” probably was the same as “the citadel by the temple” in 2:8 (cf. 7:2).⁴⁷⁷ T. Eskenazi observes that this tower is mentioned in only two places outside Nehemiah (cf. 12:39): Jer 31:38 and Zech 14:10. The context of both these texts is the eschatological restoration of Jerusalem. Its mention in the ceremony of dedication in 12:39, “combined with the consecration in Neh 3:1, gathers around it associations and expectations that extend beyond mere architectural information. Such clustering of associations casts the sanctification and the repair or restoration of the Tower of Hananel as the enactment of a larger theological-salvific vision.”⁴⁸⁸ Building the wall was part of the fulfillment of the word of Jeremiah (Ezra 1:1) and its completion would mean the restoration of the holy city (11:1, 18), despite the incompleteness of that restoration due to the continuing sins of the people.

When the people finished the whole wall, they had a dedication ceremony. This is the only section where a separate dedication is mentioned.⁴⁹⁹ T. Eskenazi believes that this amounted to the high priest’s dedication of the whole project and that it shows its religious significance. The walls, she argues, were regarded as an extension of the house of God.⁵¹⁰⁰

3:2 This was a cooperative effort. People from all professions and trades helped, coming from many villages and outlying areas of Judah. In some cases the names of the leaders are not mentioned.

3:3 The “Fish Gate” was near the northwest corner, probably also called the Ephraim Gate (8:16; 12:39; 2 Kgs 14:13) and the Middle Gate (Jer 39:3).⁵¹¹ There probably was a fish market there at one time. It is thought to have been near the location of the present-day Damascus Gate.

3:4 “Meremoth” was known to both Ezra and Nehemiah. “Repaired,” literally “to make firm or strong,” is used many times in the following verses. At times, especially in vv. 16–31, it is used even if the old wall was located at a different place and a completely new section of wall had to be built.

3:5 “Tekoa,” located southeast of Bethlehem, was the home of the prophet Amos. Since it was close to the area controlled by Geshem the Arab, perhaps the nobles who “would not put

⁷⁴⁷ D. J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eedrmans, 1984), 151.

⁸⁴⁸ T. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 86.

⁹⁴⁹ The term קִדְּשׁוּהוּ (“they dedicated it”) occurs twice in the verse. Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 195) emends the first occurrence to קִרְּשׁוּהוּ (“they boarded it”).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 84–85. She suggests that the wall’s being viewed as an extension of the house of God explains the unusual appointing of Levites to guard the gates of the city (7:1; 13:22).

¹¹⁵¹ Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 151. See, however, the very helpful diagram in R. W. Wood, *New Bible Atlas* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985), 102.

their shoulders to the work” were influenced by or afraid of him. Whatever their reason, it indicates that some of the Jews did not support Nehemiah’s plan.

3:6 The name “Jeshanah gate,” is often understood as an abbreviated form of “the gate of the old city” or slightly emended to read “the Mishneh Gate,” opening into the second (*mišneh*) district of Jerusalem on the western hill (2 Kgs 22:14; Zeph 1:10).⁵¹²² It was near the northwest corner of the walled city.

3:7 Gibeon, modern El-Jib, was about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. Originally a Canaanite city that tricked Joshua into an alliance (Josh 9–11), it was made a levitical city in Benjamin (Josh 18:25; 21:17). “Mizpah,” probably the modern Tell en-Nasbeh, was located in the territory of Benjamin (Josh 18:26) about seven and a half miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was fortified by King Asa (1 Kgs 15:22), and Gedaliah governed there after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:23). Meronoth was probably nearby. “Places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates,” a difficult phrase to translate, is literally “to the seat of the governor of Trans-Euphrates.” Fensham translates “up to the quarters of the governor of TransEuphrates,” which gives the impression that the governor had a place to stay in Jerusalem.⁵¹³³ Mizpah probably was the governor’s residence when he visited the province.⁵¹⁴⁴

3:8 Guilds such as “goldsmiths” and “perfume-makers” have been known since ancient Sumer. The social organization also must have included many other guilds such as potters and bakers, who may have contributed to the building project by working at their trade.

“They restored Jerusalem”⁵¹⁵⁵ may also be rendered, “They left out” or “abandoned [part of] Jerusalem” (the more common meaning; see NIV text note). If this is the intended meaning, it suggests that the builders left the course of the old wall at this point or that they left part of the former city outside the wall.

3:9 The word “district,” *pelek*, refers to the countryside near a town or city.⁵¹⁶⁶ The province of Judah was subdivided into smaller administrative areas.⁵¹⁷⁷ The Persians often left the administration of these units in the hands of the local people, so some of these may have been Jews who had not gone into captivity. Whatever their background, the involvement of rulers (cf. vv. 12–19)—along with priests, merchants, and people from outlying towns—shows an amazing cooperative spirit as well as Nehemiah’s administrative skill.

3:10 Naturally those with homes near the wall would have been most enthusiastic about making repairs in that area (cf. vv. 23, 28–30).

¹²⁵² Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 234; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 196. The emendation involves the change of הַיְשָׁנָה to הַמִּשְׁנֶה.

¹³⁵³ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 169. Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 235) rejects this translation, explaining that it would require אֶדְד־כֹּךְ rather than אֶדְד־כֹּךְ.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 197.

¹⁵⁵⁵ The Hebrew is וְיֶעֱזְבוּ.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Fensham (*Ezra and Nehemiah*, 175) translates “half of the territory of Jerusalem.”

¹⁷⁵⁷ Blenkinsopp (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 235–36) claims that “the province was divided into six districts and twelve subdistricts each with its principal and secondary administrative center: Jerusalem (Netophah), Beth-zur (Tekoa), Keilah (Adullam), Beth-haccherem (Zanoah), Mizpah (Gibeon), and Jericho (Senaah). Of these all but two (Netophah and Adullam) provided manpower.”

3:11 “Repaired another section” also can be translated “repaired a second section,” meaning that these men finished one section and then worked on another. A number of men and groups are named as doing the same.⁵¹⁸⁸ The ovens referred to in this verse (also 12:38) would have been either for baking bread or for firing pottery.

3:12 “Shallum,” as was Rephaiah in v. 9, was ruler of part of the countryside around Jerusalem. Some understand *běnôt*, “daughters,” as “small towns” and translate “he and men from small towns.”⁵¹⁹⁹ It is true that *běnôt* is used of “daughter” towns, but here the masculine suffix argues for the NIV translation.⁶²⁰⁰ If Shallum had no sons, his daughters would have inherited his property (Num 27:1–11). This mention of women involved in the work again demonstrates the extent of Nehemiah’s support and his mobilization of the people.⁶²¹¹

3:13 “Zanoah” was about thirteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. The “five hundred yards” was a long sector, which may indicate much of the old wall at that point was still in good condition.⁶²²²

3:14 “Beth Hakkerem,” the capital of a district of Judah, has not been identified with certainty. It may have been at Ramat Rahel three miles south of Jerusalem near Bethlehem, about five miles west of Jerusalem at Ein Karim, or at a site yet to be identified.⁶²³³

3:15 The “district” of Mizpah was distinct from the town and had its own ruler (see v. 19 and comments at 3:9). “The City of David” refers to the eastern hill, the original City of David, which was a small area south of the temple.

(2) The Construction of the Eastern Wall (3:16–32)

The style of this section of the text is somewhat different from vv. 1–15. The most evident difference is that the landmarks are now primarily houses and other buildings instead of gates. Some scholars think they were originally two different lists; however, a better explanation is that the wall on the east side of the city did not follow the old wall but was built farther up on the crest of the hill.

3:16 Beth Zur was a town some thirteen miles south of Jerusalem and marked the southern limits of the province of Judah. The Nehemiah mentioned here is a different “Nehemiah” from the one we have been following. “The artificial⁶²⁴⁴ pool” may have been the same as the King’s Pool of 2:14.

3:17–21 Hashabiah was a Levite who was ruler of his territory. The high priest’s house is mentioned in v. 20. On one side of the house the Levites built the wall (vv. 17–19), and the

¹⁸⁵⁸ See the introduction to this section and n. 36.

¹⁹⁵⁹ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 176.

²⁰⁶⁰ See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 207.

²¹⁶¹ Clines (*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 154) believes the daughters were mentioned only because Shallum had no sons. There is no reason to think they were the only women involved in the construction.

²²⁶² On the Valley Gate and the Dung Gate, see the comments at 2:13.

²³⁶³ See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 236.

²⁴⁶⁴ This is a qal passive participle from עָשָׂה (“do, make”). NKJV translates “man-made.” The name distinguishes it from the Pool of Siloam.

priests built on the other side (vv. 20–22). In 10:1–8 Baruch (3:20) and Meremoth (3:21) are listed among the priests.

As the NIV text note indicates, the Hebrew has “Bavvai” in v. 18, which is considered a scribal error for “Binnui.” Verse 24 says he also restored another section. Ezer probably was ruler of the city of Mizpah as opposed to the countryside (v. 15).

It must have been a great honor for Baruch (whose name meant “blessed”) to have been commended for zeal by Nehemiah (v. 20). His zeal for such “menial tasks” as building a wall for the Lord must have inspired those who worked with him.⁶²⁵⁵

3:22–27 “The surrounding region” (v. 22) must refer to the rural area around Jerusalem.⁶²⁶⁶ The “court of the guard” (v. 25) is mentioned in Jer 32:2. “The hill of Ophel” was part of the east ridge between the City of David and the temple area (2 Chr 27:3; 33:14). It had been included in the city by Solomon.⁶²⁷⁷

Fensham suggests that “opposite the Water Gate” refers to a turn in the wall so that it was “opposite” the Water Gate.⁶²⁸⁸ However, if the new wall was farther up the slope than the old wall, then “opposite” the gate may simply mean “up the hill” from that gate (“above” in v. 28 may be equivalent to “opposite” in v. 31). The “Water Gate” led from the palace-temple complex to the Gihon Spring (cf. 8:1, 3, 16; 12:37).

3:28–29 The text of 2 Chr 23:15 gives the impression that the “Horse Gate” was an entrance to the palace, but Jer 31:40 indicates it was a gate in the city wall.

“The East Gate” in v. 29 is related to “the east gate of the LORD’s house” in Ezek 10:19⁶²⁹⁹ (cf. also 11:1; 40:6, 10). It is thought to have been where the Golden Gate later stood.

3:30–31 There were chambers or rooms in the temple construction as indicated by Ezra 10:6 and Neh 12:44. Tobiah’s family was related by marriage to Meshullam (Neh 6:18), who even gave Tobiah the use of one of these rooms (13:4–9). “The Inspection Gate” in v. 31 is sometimes translated “Muster Gate” or “Watch Gate.” Blenkinsopp suggests it may have been “a designated point for assembly and review, perhaps for the temple or palace guard.”⁷³⁰⁰

Despite its mundane appearance, this chapter is more than a construction record. Although the walls and gates would serve a military purpose (cf. Neh 4), the book’s concern for separation from pagan influence suggests it also had symbolic significance (cf. 13:19–22). Rather than simply providing security, the walls encouraged in the people of God a sense of identity and distinctiveness. Their restoration also represented a reversal of the humiliation of defeat and destruction suffered because of Israel’s sin (cf. 2:3, 17). Like the restored temple, the rebuilt

²⁵⁶⁵ Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 198) thinks that הִתְחַדֵּר (“zealously”) is a dittography from the preceding word אֶתְחַדֵּי or a scribal gloss on the end of v. 19.

²⁶⁶⁶ The word הַכָּנָר is used in Gen 13:10 of the lower plain of the Jordan (hence RSV “men of the Plain,” but “men of the surrounding area” in NRSV). NIV translation is correct here. The term probably included priestly villages like Anathoth (Jer 1:1).

²⁷⁶⁷ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 240.

²⁸⁶⁸ Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 178.

²⁹⁶⁹ The word there for “east,” however, is הַקִּדְמוֹנִי rather than הַמִּזְרָח, which occurs here.

³⁰⁷⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 239.

walls would assure the Jews of God's redemptive presence among them.⁷³¹¹ For the Christian, however, the continuing demonstration of God's powerful and loving presence is the cross (Rom 5:5–11).

This chapter also contains important teachings for Christians today. One reason the work progressed was that everyone took part, from rulers and temple personnel to merchants and citizens with their families (cf. 1 Cor 12:4–13, 27–30). Even the people from the villages who lived a distance from Jerusalem also helped. They felt part of the community, even though they personally received fewer direct benefits. McConville suggests that “their co-operation on the walls is one of the Old Testament's finest pictures of its ideal of Israelite brotherhood”⁷³²² (cf. John 17:21–23; 1 Thess 1:7–8; 2 Cor 8:3–5; 9:1–2). Even their enemies were amazed at the results (notice the same in Acts 2:43–47; 4:32). In order not only to survive but also to be effective in the midst of opposition from a hostile secular culture, the church must exhibit a cooperative spirit. Another reason for the Jews' success was Nehemiah's wise delegation of labor. He knew how to choose leaders and to delegate authority (cf. 2 Tim 2:2). Also, many built the part nearest their own house. A leader must take into account family and incentive factors in planning and delegating responsibilities (cf. Eph 4:11–13).³³

Nehemiah 3. The work is shared out

This catalogue of largely forgotten names and places reveals an extraordinary feat of organization and concerted action. It has all the marks of a shared enthusiasm, shown in the heterogeneous groups which set to work on their adjacent stretches of wall, some as family units, others by towns, crafts (e.g. the goldsmiths, and the perfumer of verse 8), trades (the

³¹⁷¹ McConville (*Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 88) explains that “the Lord was giving his people a badge, a further token—alongside the Temple—that they *were* his people.”

³²⁷² Ibid., 89.

³³ Mervin Breneman, [*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 184–192.

merchants: 31f.) and callings (the priests: 1, 21f., 28; Levites: 17f.; temple servants: 26; district officers: 9, 12, 15–17). One man has even mobilized his daughters (12; see comment). There is also a single jarring note (see on verse 5)—enough to highlight the extraordinary degree of unanimity achieved.

From Dr Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in the 1960s it seems more than probable that on the east side of the city Nehemiah's wall hugged the crest of the ridge above the Kidron gorge, whereas the earlier wall had taken a wider sweep at a lower level, near enough to the valley bottom to dominate the Gihon spring. In the new situation, with a mass of heavy debris down the valley side, with the reduced importance of the Gihon (since the development of efficient storage cisterns) and with only a small population to defend the city, Nehemiah had every reason to shorten the line and keep to the high ground. See, further, on verses 20ff.¹³⁴⁴

1. The account proceeds anti-clockwise, starting and finishing at *the Sheep Gate* (cf. verse 32), which we know to have been near the north-eastern corner. Its position is fixed for us by its proximity to the pool of Bethesda (John 5:2), a site which has been clearly identified.

The lead given by *Eliashib* and *the priests* was decisive, and the fact that they *consecrated* their portion of the work emphasized the nature of the whole enterprise. When it was complete, the entire wall would be dedicated in a ceremony of processions, songs and sacrifices (12:27ff.). This section of the wall was near to the Temple, which lay towards the north end of the city; but the exact position of the two towers mentioned here is not yet known: only that they were points reached as one moved westward along the north wall. In fact very few of these carefully recorded points are now identifiable, since a living city offers little scope for excavation.

Nehemiah's Jerusalem (after Aharoni and Avi-Yonah). The site names are derived from Neh. 3:1–32, proceeding anti-clockwise from the Sheep Gate at the NE corner.

2, 3. Several of the place-names in this chapter are found also in the list of local groups of the first homecomers from exile, in Ezra 2 (reproduced in Neh. 7). The 'sons' of Jericho and of Senaah were among these (Ezra 2:34f.), which makes it likely that *Hassenaah* in this verse is a place (i.e. Senaah preceded by the definite article) rather than a person.¹³⁵⁵

4. The word *repaired* will now dominate the chapter. As Coggins³⁶ points out, the Hebrew verb is a general term meaning 'to make firm or strong'. It does not necessarily mean restoring everything as before.

Meremoth is important, since he and Malchijah (11) provide links between the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are sometimes thought to have had no common ground.¹³⁷⁶ In Ezra 8:33 Meremoth, son of Uriah, checked in the treasure brought by Ezra from Babylon; and in Ezra

³⁴¹⁴ For fuller details see K. M. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem*, esp. pp. 89, 96, 181–187.

³⁵¹⁵ In Neh. 11:9, however, the similar name Hassenuah is personal, or possibly descriptive (see the comment there).

³⁶ Coggins *Ezra and Nehemiah* by R. J. Coggins (*Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible*), 1976.

³⁷¹⁶ See Appendix 4, esp. p. 173.

10:31, Malchijah, son of Harim, was one of those who submitted to Ezra's purge of mixed marriages. See, however, the comment on Ezra 2:61.

5. This is a vivid touch, a glimpse of petty pride rather than half-heartedness. The unbending *neck* is a standard picture of this unbiddable attitude (e.g. Ps. 75:5, or with a different word, Exod. 32:9), and probably *their Lord* here means 'their supervisors'. (The word is plural, though it could be a plural of majesty referring to God, as ^{RS}³⁸_V implies.) However, if the *nobles* cut a sorry figure (what would Amos, their townsman, have said!) the rest of their community had nothing to be ashamed of: they were responsible for two sections of the wall (see verse 27). Nor was there any support for the nobles from others of their status: see e.g. verses 9 and 12.

7. The end of this verse may imply that Gibeon and Mizpah were outside the boundary of Judah, and were for some reason under the direct control of the provincial governor (see on Ezra 4:10 for the term *Beyond the River*). But the clause, *who were under the jurisdiction of*, is but one interpretation of a rather cryptic Hebrew expression.¹³⁹⁷

8. On the variety of helpers (here turning to work that was utterly unlike their own) see the opening comments on the chapter.¹⁴⁰⁸

9. Here and in verse 12 we meet two ruling officials, among the many in this chapter who put the nobles of Tekoah (5) to shame. This word for ruler is mostly translated 'prince' elsewhere in the Old Testament, although it has no royal implication. *District* basically means 'spindle', and seems to indicate the 'circle' or surrounding area rather than the city itself, and is used in connection with other towns in this chapter: see, besides verse 12, verses 14–18.

11. *Malchijah the son of Harim* is of special interest as a link with the activities of Ezra: see on verse 4.

12. See on verse 9 for this man's status. Some writers (e.g. Ackroyd⁴¹) have suggested that the *daughters* mean the villages in his district. But villages are only called daughters in relation to their mother-cities (as in Ezek. 16:53ff.), not in relation to their rulers. This is a genuine family effort.

13–15. The *Valley Gate* had been the starting-point for Nehemiah's nocturnal tour of inspection. For suggested locations of the landmarks in these three verses see the second paragraph on 2:11–15.

16. This *Nehemiah* is one of three people so named, including one of the first homecomers with Zerubbabel, nearly a century before (Ezra 2:2). The name means 'Yahweh has comforted'.

³⁸_{RSV} American Revised Standard Version, 1952.

³⁹¹⁷ Heb. *l'ekissê*, lit. 'to' (or 'belonging to') 'the seat of': hence ^{NEB}, '... did the repairs as far as the seat of.... But how likely is it that the satrap had an official residence in this up-country city? Also the chapter has no other occurrence of the preposition *l* in the sense of 'as far as' or (in a local sense) 'to'. Every such expression here represents the Heb. 'ad.

⁴⁰¹⁸ The word for *restored* has the same form as the Heb. for 'abandoned', hence the marginal note. But it is a distinct root, whose meaning is clear, both here and at 4:2 (3:34, Heb.) and is put beyond doubt in Exod. 23:5, where it occurs three times: viz., '... and would refrain from restoring it—you shall certainly restore it' (lit. restoring you shall restore it). There is an apparently related Ugaritic root 'db, 'prepare, set'.

⁴¹Ackroyd *1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah* by P. R. Ackroyd (*Torch Bible Commentaries*), 1973.

The sepulchres of David are presumably plural to include those of his descendants. We learn from 1 Kings 2:10 that David was buried in the city that bore his name, i.e. this southern part of the eastern ridge of Jerusalem. His traditional tomb, however, is on the western ridge, although the archaeological evidence is quite clear that the city of David was not on that side.¹⁴²⁹

The *artificial pool* is perhaps another name for ‘the King’s Pool’ mentioned in 2:14; but another candidate for that identification is ‘the Pool of Shelah of the king’s garden’ (3:15) if it is distinct from the pool of Siloam discussed at 2:11–15.

17ff. On either side of the high priest’s house (20)²⁴³⁰ the work was done by Levites (17–19) and priests (20–22). This was a section of the east wall, but the main priestly responsibility was part of the north wall, mentioned in verse 1. The ruler of Mizpah (19) will have administered the town of that name, as distinct from the surrounding district mentioned in verse 15. *The Angle* (3:19f.) does not refer to a main corner of the wall, since we are still tracing the line of the eastern wall as it runs from south to north alongside the Kidron gorge; and there is soon another ‘angle’ in verses 24f. It may have been a projection or indentation of the wall’s course, or NE⁴⁴B may be right in translating it ‘the escarpment’.

20ff. It was first pointed out by Roger Dieny, a research student of the Jerusalem Ecole Biblique and a member of Dr Kenyon’s 1962 excavation team, that the indications that Nehemiah shortened the building line along the east side of the city by keeping to the top of the ridge (see the second introductory paragraph to the chapter, above) may be indirectly borne out by the landmarks mentioned in these remaining verses. Private houses are from now on the chief points of reference, and where the narrative mentions city gates it is to pinpoint a position as ‘opposite’ one (26, 31), or ‘above’ another (28), not to record their repair as was the case in verses 1, 3, 6, 13, 14, 15.

21, 22. *Meremoth*, like a few other individuals and groups (e.g. the Tekoites, verses 5 and 27), rebuilt more than one section of the wall. On his identity and its significance, see on verse 4.

24, 25. On the *Angle*, see on verse 19f. above.

26, 27. *Ophel*, meaning a swelling or eminence, was the beginning of the Temple hill, hence a convenient area for the *temple servants*, the Nethinim (see on Ezra 2:43–54). It mounted towards the north end of this eastern ridge of Jerusalem. The *Water Gate* was presumably opposite the Gihon spring, the city’s main water-supply apart from rainwater cisterns; if so, it would be a little short of halfway along the eastern wall from south to north, before reaching the beginning of the Ophel, as the end of verse 27 confirms. *The wall of Ophel* may refer to what remained of the ‘outer wall ... west of Gihon, in the valley’, which Manasseh ‘carried ... round Ophel, and raised to a very great height’ (2 Chr. 33:14). If so, it is either mentioned here as a landmark seen from above (cf. ‘above the Horse Gate’, in the next verse, 28), or else it marks the place where the old wall has climbed the valley-side to be joined by the new one.

⁴²¹⁹ See, e.g. K. M. Kenyon, op. cit., pp. 37f.

⁴³²⁰ Both Baruch (20) and Meremoth (21) appear in the list of priests in 10:1–8. On Meremoth see also on verse 4 of the present chapter.

⁴⁴NEB The New English Bible: Old Testament, 1970.

On the *Tekoites* (27) with their double stint,²⁴⁵¹ see on verse 5.

31, 32. *The corner* is a different word from ‘the Angle’ of verses 19f., 24f., and may perhaps mark the point at which the east wall was met by the north wall. But the word has already been used in 24b (RS⁴⁶V 25a), where it marked no major change of direction. Finally, however, we are brought back to the starting-point of this left-handed tour of the walls, at the *Sheep Gate* which was mentioned at the outset, to find that the high priest and his fellows (1, 2) are working side by side with the craftsmen-artists and the men of trade. It symbolizes the whole enterprise⁴⁷

A task so enormous as rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, especially under adverse conditions, called for unusual organizational effort. The uniqueness of Nehemiah’s plan is evident in this chapter. Several aspects of his delegation of the work are evident.

⁴⁵²¹ There are six other mentions of double work, since ‘another’ means lit. ‘a second’, in verses 11, (19–21), 24, (30. But in most of these cases there is no mention of the original task to which ‘a second’ was added. (The exceptions, besides the *Tekoites*, are *Meremoth*, verses 4 and 21, and possibly *Binnui* (24), if the *Bavvai* of verse 18 is a copyist’s error for his name.) So the list is evidently not exhaustive, and not every occurrence of ‘after him/them’ will necessarily mean ‘immediately after’—unlike the apparently stricter expression ‘next to him/them’ in, e.g., verses 2, 4, 5, etc.

⁴⁶RSV American Revised Standard Version, 1952.

⁴⁷ Derek Kidner, [*Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 12, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 92–98.

He assigned everyone a specific place to work. This coordination stands out in the phrases “next to him,” “next to them,” “next to that,” “the next section,” “beside him,” and “beyond them,” which occur 28 times in this chapter.

Assignments were made near people’s houses (vv. 21, 23–24, 26, 28–30). Reasons for this plan are obvious. First, people who were assigned to sections of the wall near their homes would be more personally involved and consequently more highly motivated. Second, they would not have to travel to another part of the city to do the job, wasting valuable time. Third, in case of attack they would not be tempted to leave their posts, but would stay and protect their families. Fourth, the whole task would be a family effort, utilizing all available talent.

Commuters also had a part. Men whose homes were outside of Jerusalem—in Jericho (v. 2), Tekoa (vv. 5, 27), Gibeon (v. 7), and Mizpah (v. 7)—were assigned to sections of the wall where there were few homes. Those workers were asked to complete tasks that would not be as conveniently handled by the permanent residents in Jerusalem.

Assignments were also made by vocation. For example, the high priest and his fellow priests were assigned to rebuild the Sheep Gate (v. 1). This was of particular interest to them, because animals were brought through that gate to the temple for sacrifice. Other priests are mentioned in verses 22, 28. Other workers whose vocations are listed include goldsmiths (vv. 8, 31–32), perfume-makers (v. 8), district and half-district rulers (vv. 9–12, 14–19), Levites (v. 17), and merchants (vv. 31–32). Even one man’s daughters were involved (v. 12).

1. WORKERS ON THE NORTH WALL (3:1–5)

The map “Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah” shows the 11 gates and four towers mentioned in this chapter. Of the 11 gates, 6 were repaired (vv. 1, 3, 6, 13–15).

3:1–2. Nehemiah’s account of the repairs begins with **the Sheep Gate** at the northeast of the wall, and proceeds counterclockwise. The Sheep Gate is known to have been in that location because it was near the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:2), which archeologists have located in that area.

Eliashib the high priest (cf. Neh. 13:4) was a grandson of Jeshua (12:10), the high priest in Zerubbabel’s day (Ezra 3:2). Eliashib and other **priests** (cf. Neh. 3:22) repaired and **dedicated** the Sheep Gate and then repaired the walls to **the Tower of the Hundred** and **the Tower of Hananel** (also mentioned in 12:39; Jer. 31:38; Zech. 14:10). The exact locations of these two towers are not known, but they were between the Sheep Gate and the Fish Gate.

3:3–5. **The Fish Gate** may have been the gate through which the people of Tyre brought fish they sold (13:16). **Meremoth**, a priest’s **son** (cf. Ezra 8:33), also worked on a second **section** (Neh. 3:21), as did **Meshullam** (v. 30), whose daughter was married to Tobiah’s son (6:18). **The men of Tekoa**, Amos’ hometown (Amos 1:1) about 12 miles south of Jerusalem, **repaired a section**. Though the **nobles** of Tekoa did **not** help in the project, others from Tekoa took on another section, on the east wall (Neh. 3:27).

2. WORKERS ON THE WEST WALL (3:6–12)

3:6–12. Between **the Jeshanah** (or “Old”; cf. NI⁴⁸ V marg⁴⁹.) **Gate** (v. 6) and **the Broad Wall** (v. 8) was the Gate of Ephraim (cf. 12:39). **Gibeon and Mizpah** were a few miles northwest of Jerusalem. (Meremoth’s site is unknown.) Somewhat surprisingly, those towns were **under ... the governor of Trans-Euphrates** (cf. 2:9). The exact sites of those gates and of **the Tower of the Ovens** (3:11) is not known, but the tower may have been near the ovens in the street of the bakers (Jer. 37:21). A goldsmith and a perfume-maker (Neh. 3:8) took on a different line of work when they went into construction labor. Even rulers of Jerusalem’s districts and half-districts (vv. 9, 12; cf. vv. 14–15) took up tools for the building project.

3. WORKERS ON THE SOUTH WALL (3:13–14)

3:13–14. **The Valley Gate** was where Nehemiah’s nighttime inspection tour began and ended (2:13, 15). **The Dung Gate** was so named because it led to the Hinnom Valley south of the city where refuse was dumped.

4. WORKERS ON THE SOUTHEAST WALL (3:15–27)

3:15–16. **The Fountain Gate** was on the east wall, north of the Dung Gate. **The Pool of Siloam** was near **the King’s Garden**, near which Zedekiah, Judah’s last king, had gone in his attempt to escape from Jerusalem while the Babylonians were conquering the city (Jer. 39:4).

The tombs of David refer to those of David and his descendants, the kings of Judah. David was buried in this area, “the city of David” (1 Kings 2:10). **The artificial pool** may be the King’s Pool (Neh. 2:14) or perhaps the “lower pool” (Isa. 22:9). **The House of the Heroes** may have been the barracks of David’s select soldiers, or “mighty men” (2 Sam. 23:8).

3:17–27. **Binnui** (v. 18) also **repaired another section** (v. 24). **The armory** (v. 19) is another point near the eastern wall. **The angle** was apparently some turn in the wall. Another **angle** is mentioned in verses 24–25.

Private houses were some of the points of reference: **the house of Eliashib the high priest** (vv. 20–21; cf. v. 1), **Benjamin** and Hasshub’s **house** (v. 23), and **Azariah’s house** (vv. 23–24). Other houses were mentioned later including the priests’ houses (v. 28), Zadok’s house (v. 29), Meshullam’s house (v. 30), and “the house of the temple servants and the merchants” (v. 31).

Meremoth (v. 21) **repaired** two sections (cf. v. 4), as did the Tekoites (vv. 5, 27). **Priests** (v. 22; cf. v. 1) and **Levites** (v. 17) were involved in the repair work, closer to the temple than to other parts of the wall. The **tower** (v. 25) was near the **palace**, presumably the palace built by Solomon (1 Kings 7:1–8). **The court of the guard** may have been part of Solomon’s great courtyard near his palace (1 Kings 7:9–12). **The hill of Ophel** (Neh. 3:26) was the area between the city of David and the temple mount. Understandably **the temple servants** lived near the temple area.

5. WORKERS ON THE NORTHEAST WALL (3:28–32)

⁴⁸NIV New International Version

⁴⁹marg. margin, marginal reading

3:28–32. **The Horse Gate** (v. 28) on the east wall may have been where horses entered the palace area. **The East Gate** (v. 29) was directly east of the temple area. **Malkijah** (v. 31) is the third man by this name in this chapter (see vv. 11, 14). His wall **repairs** extended south to **the house of the temple servants**, who are mentioned in verse 26 as living on the hill of Ophel. **Merchants** also lived in that area near the temple servants. **The Inspection Gate** was at the northeast corner of the wall (cf. **the corner** in v. 24). **The room above the corner** was a room on the wall whose purpose is not known. **The Sheep Gate** brings the reader back to the starting point (cf. v. 1).

E. Nehemiah's reactions to opposition (chap. 4)

Nehemiah's Problems and His Responses

Problems

Responses

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Walls broken and gates burned (1:2–3) | 1. Grief and <i>prayer</i> (1:4), and motivation of the people to rebuild (2:17–18) |
| 2. False accusations of the workers (2:19) | 2. Confidence that God would give them success (2:20) |
| 3. Ridicule of the workers (4:1–3) | 3. <i>Prayer</i> (4:4–5) and action (greater diligence in the work, 4:6) |
| 4. Plot to attack the workers (4:7–8) | 4. <i>Prayer</i> and action (posting of a guard, 4:9) |
| 5. Physical exhaustion and threat of murder (4:10–12) | 5. Positioning of the people by families with weapons (4:13, 16–18) and encouragement of the people (4:14, 20) |
| 6. Economic crisis and greed (5:1–5) | 6. Anger (5:6), reflection, rebuke (5:7), and action (having the people return the debtors' interest, 5:7b–11) |
| 7. Plot to assassinate (or at least harm) Nehemiah (6:1–2) | 7. Refusal to cooperate (6:3) |
| 8. Slander against Nehemiah (6:5–7) | 8. Denial (6:8) and <i>prayer</i> (6:9) |
| 9. Plot to discredit Nehemiah (6:13) | 9. Refusal to cooperate (6:11–13) and <i>prayer</i> (6:14) |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 10. Tobiah moved into a temple storeroom (13:4–7) | 10. Tossing out Tobiah's furniture (13:8) |
| 11. Neglect of temple tithes and offerings (13:10) | 11. Rebuke (13:11a), stationing the Levites at their posts (13:11b), and <i>prayer</i> (13:14) |
| 12. Violation of the Sabbath by business activities (13:15–16) | 12. Rebuke (13:17–18), posting of guards (13:19, and <i>prayer</i> (13:22) |
| 13. Mixed marriages (13:23–24) | 13. Rebuke (13:25–27), removal of a guilty priest (13:28), and <i>prayer</i> (13:29) |

Chapter 3 might give the impression that once Nehemiah had carefully assigned everyone to a particular section of the wall, from that time on everything progressed smoothly. Not so! God's work seldom goes forward without opposition. In fact, as seen in the chart "Nehemiah's Problems and His Responses," this new leader in Judah faced many problems.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Gene A. Getz, "[Nehemiah](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 678–681.