Building, God's Way

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Jeremy Norton teaches on Nehemiah 3.!

His kinsmen have returned from Jerusalem, and the people there are in great distress and reproach. The wall is broken down, the gates are burned with fire. Chapter 1 proceeds to record Nehemiah's response.
He sat down and wept and mourned for days. He fasted and prayed. In chapter 2, we see Nehemiah begin to take action. He asks the king for the things that he will need to accomplish the task of rebuilding the wall and restoring the gates.
Through God's working, the king grants Nehemiah's requests. He gives him a leave of absence from his job as the king's cupbearer to work on the project.
He gives him letters to inform the governors of the region that the project may go forward reversing his prior decision. And he gives him authorization to access the king's forest for the supplies he will need to do the rebuilding.
[1:21] The king also sends a protection detail that Nehemiah did not request. Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem. Upon arrival, he rests for three days. Then he goes out at night to assess the situation to determine the state of the walls and the gates.

He finds they are broken down and its gates are consumed with fire, just as he was told. After reviewing the rubble, he proceeds to lay out his challenge to the people. Let me read Nehemiah 2, 17-20 to kind of get a running start for this week.
Then I said to them, You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.
I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, Let us arise and build. So they put their hands to the good work.
But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they mocked us and despised us and said, What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?
[2:27] So I answered them and said to them, The God of heaven will give us success. Therefore we, his servants, will arise and build. But you have no portion, rite, or memorial in Jerusalem.

Evan helpfully described this last week as preparing to rebuild. This week we are going to see the building effort take shape. Our main idea is that God enlists all of his people to rebuild and they work shoulder to shoulder to fulfill the mission.
God enlists all of his people to rebuild and they work shoulder to shoulder to fulfill the mission. The text is laid out in a detailed format moving around the city and providing information on the whole construction project.
It reads much like this person or this group of people worked on this section of the wall or gates and this other group worked next to them. As I studied this week, this felt a bit like a genealogy. So we are going to take a similar approach to studying as we have when we have looked at genealogies in the past.
Rather than reading all the text out loud, I want each of you individually to read through it yourselves, make some notes about things that stick out or are different, and then have some discussion around your table about those observations.
[3:38] And then we'll come back together and discuss as a large group and consider how we can apply this passage. I listed some questions on the back of the handout there for you to consider. Those are, what do you notice about the people described in Nehemiah 3?

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Are there any that behave differently? How does Nehemiah 3 describe the places being repaired? And then the last question there is, who participated in the project?
Let's go ahead and bring it back. We'll talk about it as a group. So I want to frame this as under three points. People, places, participation. So people, places, participation is where we'll end up. So I kind of want to start with that first question.
And the first blank there is God's people in your outline. It starts with Eliashib the high priest. He would have been a leader of the people, and because of his position, might have had other responsibilities, like sacrifices and other religious duties that he had to do.
But he and his brothers and other priests are listed first. They set the example. So we see them leading out. They're the first ones listed. Okay? That's an observation. What other observations did you guys have?
[4:50] Yeah, absolutely. So the Tekoites repaired two sections of the wall. Some of you may have seen that in verse 5 and verse 27. Tekoa was about 10 miles from Jerusalem, so they had to travel as well.

They weren't part of the city. And like Katie mentioned, their nobles didn't support the work. They didn't participate or support the building effort. The commentaries noted this was probably an issue of pride.
As nobles, they were, quote, too good to do the construction work, the manual labor. But we see the people jumping in and doing the work. Good, Katie.
Thank you. What else? Yeah, absolutely. Thank you, Sarah. So in verse 20, it says, Baruch zealously repaired another section.
This is a testament to God entrusting each person with different gifts, ability, and passion. Baruch's work was different enough from the others that Nehemiah specifically describes it as zealous.
[5:48] The application for us today is to remember that God has gifted each one in the church differently. We shouldn't be sitting around judging others' actions in light of our own.

It doesn't say that Baruch worked zealously and all the others were half-hearted. In fact, when we get to Nehemiah 4, 6, it says the people had a heart to work. Verse 20 just identifies his effort as commendable.
We should seek to do the same and spur one another on in love and good deeds. What else? Anything else we need to observe?
Absolutely. Yeah, that's a good observation. So it was a family affair. So we had sons, daughters, grandkids maybe. There are servants, which were often part of the household in ancient Israel.
The daughters in verse 12 are particularly notable because this would have been out of the norm in 450 BC. It's believed that Shulam may not have had any sons and his daughters would be the ones to inherit his estate.
[6:53] And that is why they are participating in the work effort. What else? Any other observations that you guys saw?

Yep. Yeah, we'll talk about that in a little bit more detail when we get to places. But yes, they repaired by their house. So we'll cover that in a little bit more detail in just a minute. Good. What else?
What about verse 2? What do we see in verse 2? Yeah, men of Jericho. This is about 15 to 20 miles away.
They didn't live in Jerusalem. They weren't going to necessarily benefit directly from the rebuilding. But they were motivated to come and help. What about the individual listed in verse 4?
Did you guys see anything else with him? Merrimoth? He's listed again in verse 21. So he repairs two sections of the walls like the Techoites.
[8:00] He's also mentioned in Ezra 8.33. There it talks about on the fourth day, the silver and the gold and the utensils were weighed out in the house of our God into the hand of Merrimoth, the son of Uriah the priest.

So he must have been a trustworthy individual since they entrusted him with the utensils that were returned from Babylon. So we have to remember that Ezra and Nehemiah worked together, right? And so he was son of a priest and they entrusted those utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had taken off to Babylon.
When they brought him back, they entrusted him to Merrimoth. Okay? What do we notice about the jobs? Were these people stonemasons or carpenters? I see some head shaking.

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No. No, far from it. We see priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, officials, which we like politicians, Levites, temple servants, keepers of the gates, merchants. Many of these professions would have no experience in building a wall or gates.
But when they were called to rebuild what God had placed in Nehemiah's heart to do, they got busy. This is a testament to not making excuses when God calls us to do something. The opposite of this is the story of Jonah.
[9:09] God told him to go to Nineveh and preach to the people. He not only made excuses to avoid God's command, but he tried to run away from it. This didn't end well for Jonah. He lands in the belly of a fish and God drives him to Nineveh to do what he instructed him to do in the first place.

If God is calling you into something, don't dismiss it because you haven't ever done it before or worse, presume it's beneath you. Instead, humbly and prayerfully follow what God is prompting you to do and trust he will provide the outcome in accordance with his will.
As we wrap up this section on people, I want to highlight this is a list of names and work that specific people did. It chronicles individual acknowledgement.
But how does it all start? Nehemiah 2.20 says, The God of heaven will give us success. And then we get to 3.1 and it says, Then Eliashib, the high priest, arose with his brothers and the priests and built the sheep gate and they consecrated it and hung its doors.
They consecrated the wall to the Tower of Hundred and the Tower of Henel. The work started with confidence that God would give them success and then they proceeded to set apart or consecrate the work to the Lord.
[10:26] God works through his people. Every person must be faithful to play his or her part and God gets all the glory. Okay, moving to our second point in the outline.

Your second blank there is rebuild God's places. So we have God's people rebuild God's places. Now in Old Testament times, God had specifically identified Israel and Jerusalem as the place he would make his presence known on earth.
So when I say God's people rebuild God's places, in this context that means Jerusalem. Today, just like then, God's place is with his people. But the difference is that God the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer.
So God's place is the church, the people, not the building. What do we notice about the places in chapter 3? Emily helpfully pointed out that they build in front of their houses.
Except for Eliashib. Except for Eliashib. Yeah, yeah.
[11:29] So he was building around the temple, right? He was building that sheep gate is where the sacrifices were brought into the city. And then we read later, I think there were servants building around his house, right?

Temple servants. To Ed's point, it starts and ends with the sheep gate. That's where Eliashib was working. This gate was the northeast of the temple where the sacrifices entered. And as we just discussed, it was consecrated, which means set apart as holy.
It also creates a little inclusio at the beginning and end with God in focus. So we have God in verse 1 and God at the end with the sheep gate. The narrative proceeds counterclockwise around the city, describing the reconstruction teams of the walls that were broken down and the gates that were consumed by fire.
And many of the verses start with next to or after, implying they were working right alongside each other. Some of the gates are not being restored because they didn't need to be, but they were used as waypoints to describe around the city.
Anything else about the buildings? What words are used to describe how they're building? Exactly.
[12:45] Right? So there are a couple words used, build and repair. Build seems to imply more of a complete reconstruction where repair carries the connotation of making firm or strong.

Repair doesn't necessarily mean putting it back the way it was before. So point of application here and it'll be in the application list at the end. Are there things in your life that need to be built?
So they have been completely destroyed or never existed in the first place? Or are there things that need to be repaired? They exist, but they need to be made firm or strengthened.
As an example, take your time with the Lord. Maybe you aren't spending any time with God. Seems like you might have a building project that needs to get done. Maybe your time with the Lord isn't what you know it should be.

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Seems like you might need some firming up. You need more time. You need more focus. I encourage you in both instances to pray and ask for help in building or repairing.
[13:47] If you count, there are about 40 to 45 sections of construction described. This is a leadership lesson in planning, preparation, and divisional labor. Nehemiah clearly had a plan for how to break down the work into manageable sizes for the people to complete the project as expeditiously as possible.

Remember, the local leaders saw this as a great evil. Anyone who participated in a project knows that you can't do it all yourself and you all can't work on the exact same thing at the same time or it won't get done.
He divided the work into sections that made sense and then assigned teams to work on them. Any other observations about the places, how they're described?
If you look at verse 17, there's a notable shift to describing the people working where they lived. Like Emily mentioned, it also talks about repairing by their houses.
This is another lesson in leadership. Nehemiah assigned people areas that they would have a natural incentive to rebuild well. It would have been important for them to have a strong section of the wall by their house.
[14:55] So pulling some application from this, I would say we should seek to disciple those close to us well. The stronger followers of Christ we can encourage each other to be, the better it is for us.

If I have discipled a friend well, he will be able to help me fight sin in my own life when the battle comes. Kind of lastly, this passage talks about all kinds of gates.
So I wanted to know if there was a correlation between the gates mentioned here and Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. After some research, I found that the most likely gate that Jesus used was the East Gate, mentioned in verse 29, also known as the Golden Gate.
On your map, you'll see this just east of the temple. And for context, Nehemiah is overseeing the repair of the gate through which the Savior of the world will ride into Jerusalem, be condemned as a sinner even though he was sinless, die on the cross to pay for the sins of everyone that would believe in him, and rise again on the third day, proving he was who he claimed to be, so that all that believe in him will never perish.
Now, it doesn't seem likely that Nehemiah would have known this at the time. What he did know is that God had put in his heart to rebuild Jerusalem and he obeyed. Okay, moving to our last point in the outline, and everyone participates.
[16:21] So if you take the three bullet points together, we have God's people rebuild God's places and everyone participates. We've talked about this a little bit when we discuss people, but I want to hone in on who participated in the project.

What did you observe about participation as you read through those verses? Yeah, everyone except for the nobles, right? All kinds of people were involved. Men, women, young, old, nobles, officials, servants, goldsmiths, merchants, priests.
There was no one who was excluded except those who willingly chose not to participate in the work. So the fact that everyone was included, this is precisely how our churches should function today.
God doesn't save people to sit on the sidelines. He saves them to put them in the game and serve Him during their time on earth. James Montgomery Boyce provided a helpful illustration to describe an every member ministry.
It means that ministers in churches are to prepare the people in the churches to do the church's work. That is, clergy are to teach the laity and the laity are to do the work of serving each other in the world.
[17:31] Unfortunately, many churches have it completely turned around. It is said today that churches resemble more than anything else a football game played in a large stadium. There are 80,000 spectators in the stands who badly need some exercise and there are 22 men on the field who badly need a rest.

If you don't currently have an area of ministry service, I encourage you to pray about where the Lord would have you to serve and engage. Be one of the men on the field and not a spectator in the stands.
Who's missing from this like narrative? Nehemiah. Nehemiah does not list himself in this section of the narrative. He most certainly was involved but chose not to say so at this point.

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He could have said I oversaw the building of the wall and the restoration of the gates and here are the people who helped. Rather than that, he lists people and families individually acknowledging their effort and participation in the project.
We see this humble behavior from all good leaders. They know how and when to acknowledge the people who are doing the work. To close out this section about participation, I want to look at Ephesians 4, 11-13 if you want to turn over there.
[18:50] Ephesians 4, 11-13 reads as follows. And he gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

This is the New Testament application of what we observe in Nehemiah 3. Paul is telling the Ephesians that everyone has different jobs for the purpose of equipping the builders to the building up of the body, the church, oriented toward the unity and maturity.
I mentioned some point of applications throughout, but I'm going to summarize them here at the end with some questions. One, are you engaged in the work God has called you to do?
If not, why? If so, pray for continued zeal in serving the Lord. Two, are there things in your life that need to be built, i.e.
they've been completely destroyed or never existed in the first place? are there other things that need to be repaired? Seek wisdom for next steps. And then the third one, I gave you a blank blow.
[20:14] And I said, in the space below, write down one area you are currently serving and pray for that ministry this week. To learn more, visit us in person or see the website at highlandparkbaptist.net.

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