

Dr. Tiberius Rata, Ezra-Nehemiah, Session 7, Nehemiah 3-4

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This is Dr. Tiberius Rata and his teaching on Ezra and Nehemiah. This is session 7, Nehemiah 3-4.

Please open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter three.

We are continuing our incursion. Remember where we are. Just like there were three deportations into exile, there were three returns from exile.

The first, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, about 50,000 Jews returned. About 2,000 returned with Ezra. And now, the last one, under the leadership of Nehemiah, we have an unknown number returning.

Nehemiah came and saw the damage, evaluated it, and now they are getting ready to rebuild the wall. He is a man of action, but he is not a man without opposition. We saw that the opposition started with Sanballat and Tobiah and continued with adding Geshem the Arab, and we will see the number of opponents grow.

And then we see in chapter three really a great image of teamwork. The rebuilding of the wall is accomplished through teamwork. And really, that's what chapter three is all about.

Chapter three is a blueprint of how the work was accomplished through teamwork. This was not one person doing the work. This was not, as you hear in some of our churches, 20% of the people doing 80% of the work.

No, this was everybody joining in together and doing the work of rebuilding. And we see here Eliashib, the high priest, leads by example.

1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. **2** And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them^a Zaccur the son of Imri built.

And then you continue and continue. It's truly remarkable how this was accomplished in a miraculous way as we will see. But again, I want to emphasize here the importance of leading by example.

Eliashib, even though he is the high priest, demonstrates humility, a characteristic which must be in the man of God, in the woman of God, who leads. I'm reminded of

the story of Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, and the only king who was able to unite Western Europe for the first time since the Romans. It is said that when the funeral of Charlemagne came to the cathedral, they were shocked to find the gate closed, barred by the bishop.

"'Who comes?' shouted the bishop. The heralds answered, "'Charlemagne, lord and king of the Holy Roman Empire.' Answering, for God, the bishop replied, "'Him I know not. Who comes?' The heralds, a bit shaken, answered, "'Charles the Great, a good and honest man of the earth.' Again the bishop answered, "'Him I know not. Who comes?' Now completely crushed, the heralds said, "'Charles, a lowly sinner who begs the gift of Christ.' "'Him I know,' the bishop replied. Enter.'"

Humility is a great and very important concept and needs to be present in leadership. And because Eliashib humbled himself to do the work, his brothers, the priests, followed his example.

Together, the Bible says here, they worked to rebuild the sheep gate, which was at the northeast side of the wall. Remember how Jerusalem was set during the time of Nehemiah. So, remember what I said earlier, is that initially, this was the original city of David.

And then, what we see here is Mount Zion. And then Solomon extended it further to the north, and it is here that he built the temple. But again, later, Jerusalem grew and it was added on by Hezekiah.

And then when we come to the time of Nehemiah, we have all these gates around the city. And the first gate that is mentioned here is the Sheep Gate. Again, there is no accident that they call them like that.

Again, it was very close to the temple. The scholars suggest that it is because this is where the sheep for the slaughter were brought through. Again, all these gates have names.

Now, some of us know exactly where they were, but some of us are not sure. For example, the Dung Gate is where they brought out the garbage. The Fish Gate, again, some scholars suggest it was probably close to a fish market.

Those people would go and buy their fish. Again, we know some of these gates where they are and their function, and some of them we don't know. But they start with the Sheep Gate.

Again, it is probably because they remember the importance of worship. They are reworking to return to the sacrificial system. Again, this is not an accident.

The sheep gate serves as a starting point, being analogous to Jerusalem's front door. So, if you think about this as the front door, you can think about the Sheep Gate as the front door and the Dung Gate as the back door. Again, very, very important.

But the Sheep Gate, again, was the main gate, the extension of the temple as the central reference point. And then I mentioned the Fish Gate. That's where they go next.

Verses 3 to 5, you have the sons of Hassenah built the Fish Gate. Again, we can only make an educated guess that this was probably in close proximity to a fish market where people would go and buy fish.

Verses 6 and 7 talk about the Gate of Yeshanah. Again, Yeshanna pointing to the town of Yeshanna. It was probably somewhere on the west side of the city.

Verses 8 to 10, we have mentioned here goldsmiths.

Verse 10, Next to them, Jedaiah, the son of Harumpaph, repaired opposite his house.

Again, we are introduced to the fact that people here, workers, are identified not just by their location but sometimes they are identified by their profession. Again, this was not their specialty, yet they worked together to rebuild the walls.

Verses 11 to 14 talk about people who rebuild the wall all the way to the Dung Gate. So, some people work on the gate, some people work on the wall, but it is a team effort.

Verses 15 to 21, they repaired the Fountain Gate. And again, the Fountain Gate, we can be fairly certain where it is. It could be here, close to the pool of Siloam. Again, those of you who have been to Jerusalem know about Hezekiah's tunnel that comes all the way to the pool of Siloam.

Hezekiah, I remember, built the tunnel because they had to go deep down. They couldn't go outside the city, so they built a tunnel that goes down to the spring and then into the pool.

Verses 28 to 32 talk about the Horse Gate. "The Horse Gate, the priests repaired." Again, we're not certain where the Horse Gate was. It's a question mark, but it was probably somewhere between the temple and the palace.

It seems that the Horse Gate is actually a city gate located on the eastern side of the wall, fairly close to the temple. That's why on this image you can see it's up there. But what chapter 3 emphasizes is, again, unity in diversity.

You have workers from different locations. You have workers from different levels of education and skill, different professions. And yet, they were all united under the leadership of Nehemiah.

They followed the example of the high priest, and the others followed. And they accomplished the work of reconstruction. Later in the New Testament, we are asked to keep the unity of the Spirit.

It's something very interesting that we are never told to make unity. It is the Holy Spirit that creates unity when we surrender our life to Christ. We're part of the same family.

We're not asked to make unity. We're asked to keep the unity. And being united, we can do great work for Christ.

Chapter 3 is a great example of that of teamwork. Unity in diversity for the same goal. But again, not everybody was happy.

We see in Nehemiah 4 that the opponents, the adversaries, return. And we'll see how Nehemiah responds, both in prayer and in preparation. Starting in verse 1, chapter 4. Remember, Sanballat is back at it.

1^a Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he jeered at the Jews. **2** And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves?^b Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?” **3** Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, “Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!”

Chapter 4 is one of contrasts. The faithless ridicule the faithful.

The faithless ridicule while the faithful pray. The faithless demean while the faithful plan. The faithless threaten while the faithful are encouraged by their godly leaders.

Just as the Pharisees were angered when Jesus did a good deed, so Sanballat and Tobiah derided God's people for rebuilding Jerusalem. And again, he is trying to be funny. He is mocking.

Will they restore? Will they finish? All these questions demand the answer, no. And, of course, the ridicule continues with saying that if just a solitary fox, you know, would go on the wall, it could bring it down. But Nehemiah appeals to God.

Nehemiah is a great example of what we should do in times of opposition. As I said in the past, sometimes we need to answer, but sometimes we don't need to answer. In this case, Nehemiah goes to God again.

Remember, he is a man of fasting and prayer, and he goes to God. Verses 4-6. In prayer, Nehemiah asks God to fight the battle for him.

Nehemiah doesn't deny his feelings. He feels despised. And we see elements of an imprecatory prayer here, which is very interesting.

Students ask me all the time, is it okay for us to pray these types of imprecatory prayers? Do not cover their guilt. Let not their sin be blotted. In my humble but correct opinion, it is not okay to pray imprecatory prayers today.

And the reason I say that is because of Jesus' words. We have the teaching of Jesus that teaches us what to do in cases like this. In Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, But I say to you, starting in verse 44, Even the Gentiles do the same.

So, I think we have something that they didn't have. We have, first of all, the whole counsel of God. We have the Holy Spirit in us.

And we have the words of Jesus that I think would prohibit us from praying imprecatory prayers. We can pray for protection, but we should not pray for someone's damnation. Verses 7-8.

7^c But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. **8** And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.

Remember at the beginning you have Sanballat and Tobiah.

And then you have Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. Now notice how the number of opponents increased. You have Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, the Ashdodites.

Just because you are doing something right for God doesn't mean you will not encounter opposition. And this opposition grows, and as we will see, it will grow in the way they employ their tactics.

First mocking, and then you will see threats. And now we see here they are very angry, and now they are plotting. Just as the people of God plan to rebuild, the opposition plots to destroy.

The same thing happened during the time of Jesus. Remember, the religious leaders were upset when Jesus healed the sick. And the people sang his praises.

And here you see, while the faithful under the leadership of Nehemiah planned, worked, and prayed, the faithless plot to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. The faithless always do the work of Satan, who hates God's people and wants their destruction. And again, we see the people of God going to God in prayer.

Verses 9-11 **9** And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.

10 In Judah it was said,^d "The strength of those who bear the burdens is failing. There is too much rubble. By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." **11** And our enemies said, "They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work."

We see here the reality of life.

When you encounter opposition, a lot of times you will be discouraged. And this is exactly what's happening here. They're working, they're planning, they're working.

But the opposition is making them feel weaker. That's why they said, By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall. And the enemies keep taunting them.

They will not know or see till we come among them and kill them and stop the work. Did you hear that? It starts with questions, phony questions. It continues to threats. And now they said, We will kill them. To add insult to injury, the enemy continues with the tyrants of threats. What begins as anger has become a death threat.

What will the man of God do? Well, this is what Nehemiah does. Starting in verse 12. He has words of encouragement and then they get to work.

Verses 12 through 14. Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your homes.

The way Nehemiah fights the battle, fights the enemy now, is by encouraging his followers. But again, piety is no substitute for preparation, and preparation is no substitute for piety.

And that's why he has to employ here security guards, armed guards with swords, spears and bows. Because he realized the threat and the danger from the outside was real. But he points to God.

He points to God's character. He doesn't say, Hey, you guys can do it. No.

He says, Remember the Lord who is great and awesome. Remember, the Lord was what Moses used to encourage the generation that would enter the promised land in Deuteronomy 8:18. It is the same refrain that encouraged the exilic community during the time of Jeremiah in Jeremiah 51:50. Remember, the Lord is what we also need to remember in times of hardship and opposition. Everything that we do, we do because of Him, and we do it because of His glory, and we do it through His power.

And that's what Nehemiah wanted to encourage his people and he does that. And again, you have this going back and forth with the enemies. Verses 15-18.

Did you catch that? The enemy realized that God was at work. See, the enemy knows he's working against God. The leader stood behind the whole house of Judah who were building on the wall.

Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. **18** And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

The strategy is clear. Work and defend. You have a brick on one hand and the sword on the other.

And the chapter starting in verse 20 ends like this. Again, with the words of encouragement. "Our God will fight for us."

See, the fact that God was fighting for them doesn't mean that they shouldn't fight. This was not a call to pacifism but rather a call to unity. A wise work and defend strategy.

Another practical emergency measure taken by Nehemiah was to direct the people from the villages to spend the night in Jerusalem. There was an added danger for those traveling by night. The staying in Jerusalem protected them and positioned them to help their brothers in the case the enemy undertook a night attack.

Although this is not about military strategy. This is about godly leadership. Following God, relying on God.

A man of God like Nehemiah encouraged the people to do the work. Not just the one-sided work, but defend, protect, and work. And we need wisdom, especially in our times that are very uncertain.

We need our leaders to have the wisdom of God to do the same.

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