



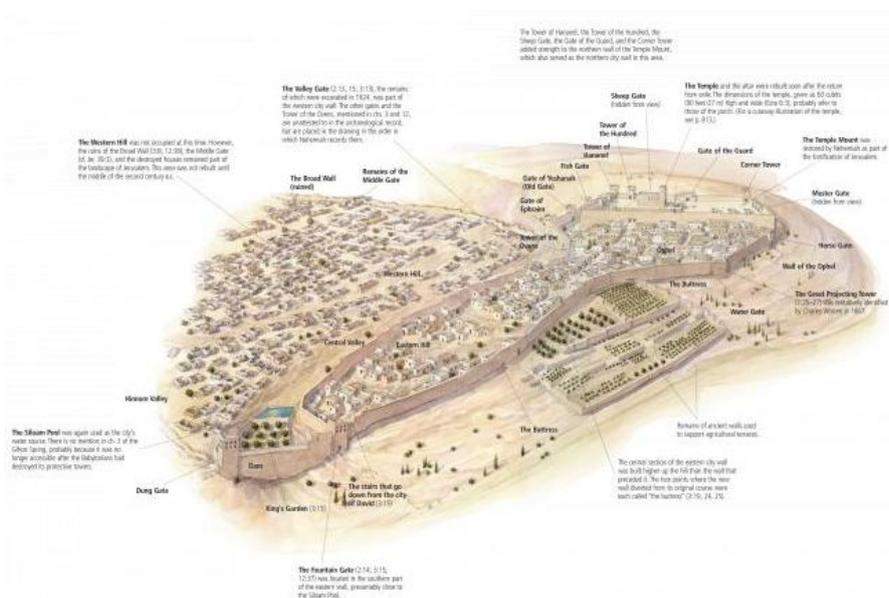
Nehemiah - Chapter Three

Summary of Chapter Three

The building work is described, and the workers are named, section by section. The point of this account is to show that the people as a whole responded to Nehemiah's challenge and believed that God would give them success. The description of the work demonstrates the concerted effort of the people.

II Nehemiah 3:1-7:4 - The Wall Is Built, Despite Difficulties

This major section records the building and repairing of the walls by all most of the people of Judæa, despite the efforts of certain groups to stop them. Excavations on the Ophel hill of Jerusalem have uncovered remains of Nehemiah's wall system. This wall system apparently incorporated walls from previous ages. It was not strongly built, and it reflects Jerusalem's diminutive size at the time.



Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah circa 444-420 BC

Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Upon their return from exile in 536 BC, the Jews, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, first restored the altar and then laid the foundation of the temple. Twenty years later, in 516 BC, the temple was rebuilt. This time period is referred to as the Second Temple period.

Later on, and under very difficult circumstances, Nehemiah restored the city wall. This is described in great detail in Chapter 3. There is ample archaeological evidence, both positive and negative, to show that only the Eastern Hill of Jerusalem was fortified at that time and that the eastern wall of the city was built higher up the slope than the previous wall, so that the city was smaller than that of King Solomon.

II.a Nehemiah 3:1-32 - Organisation of the Work

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then the high priest Eliashib set 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 Hananel. ² And the men of Jericho built next to him. And next to them Zaccur son of Imri built.

Nehemiah 3:1-2

The high priest Eliashib was the grandson of Jeshua, the priest in Zerubbabel's time: <<*Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them*>> (Ezra 5:2), and: <<*Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada*>> (Nehemiah 12:10). Eliashib acted as a godly leader should; he was out in front of the work, leading by example. He did not act as if he were too 'spiritual' for the hard work of rebuilding the walls. There is a good reason why Eliashib was first mentioned, and why the rest of the chapter is filled with the names of more than fifty others that followed his example in the work.

With his fellow-priests. The work was allocated to groups within the community, identified mainly by family and sometimes by where they lived or their profession. It began and ended at the Sheep Gate, on the northern side of the city (v.32). This was near the temple, and possibly was so named because sheep were brought through it for sacrifice; the name continued into the time of Jesus: <<*Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes*>> (John 5:2). It may also be why the priests worked here, and why they consecrated the gate. The direction of the work on the wall

was anticlockwise, although much of it would also have been carried out simultaneously.

The idea behind consecration is to recognise something as special, as uniquely set apart for God's glory and service. These city gates were made special to God. Nehemiah and Eliashib knew that God wanted everything set apart special to him, including these city walls and gates. Because the first of the work was specially set apart to God, it was a way for them to say, "All of this work belongs to you, Lord. This is a special work done unto you." This is a great secret to joy and success in life: to do everything as unto the Lord: *<<And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him>>* (Colossians 3:17).

The work is described in reference to the gates of the wall. The gates were the critical entry and exit points to the city, and the places most likely to see an enemy attack. Therefore the work started at each gate and worked out from there. The Sheep Gate was so named because it was the gate where shepherds brought their flocks to sell them. Up until a few years ago, this same gate was being used for this same purpose in Jerusalem.

That the people of God would enter into a rebuilding programme had been prophesied more than three hundred years earlier, long before the Babylonians were raised up to come against them: *<<Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in>>* (Isaiah 58:12).

The Tower of the Hundred; the Tower of Hananel. The precise line of the walls followed by Nehemiah cannot be completely reconstructed. Regarding many of the features mentioned, little is known. These towers played an important role both in the physical security of the city but also in its legend: *<<Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers>>* (Psalm 48:12), *<<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>>* (Jeremiah 31:38), and: *<<The whole land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the former gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses>>* (Zechariah 14:10).

And the men of Jericho built next to him. And next to them Zaccur son of Imri built. Nehemiah Chapter 3 is all about work - how individuals pitched in and did the work together, coordinated and led by Nehemiah. Every man's work was important, and although these did not work on a gate, they did the important job of building up the walls of protection and security for Jerusalem.

³ The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

Nehemiah 3:3

The Fish Gate may have been at the northwest corner. This gate got its name because of the nearby fish market. The sons of Hassenaah did the work of rebuilding the gate while others helped.

It was a part of the city's defences that King Manasseh had repaired after his ordeal with the Assyrians: <<Afterwards he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, reaching the entrance at the Fish Gate; he carried it around Ophel, and raised it to a very great height. He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah>> (2 Chronicles 33:14).

⁴ Next to them Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to them Meshullam son of Berechiah son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to them Zadok son of Baana made repairs.

Nehemiah 3:4

Meremoth made repairs. The work is sometimes building and sometimes repairing, suggesting that the parts of the walls were in various states of dilapidation. The word for repairs is the Hebrew word *chazaq*, used thirty five times in this chapter alone. It has the idea of strengthening, encouraging, and of making something strong. These are principles that have application to far more than material gates and walls.

The Bible says that Christians must be built up and repaired. In Ephesians 4:12, God says the purpose of the church is for the equipping of the saints, and idea behind equipping is to prepare, strengthen, and make something able to be used. The church comes together as Christians to strengthen one another, to make them strong and able to live for Jesus and to serve him outside the gatherings of the church.

⁵ Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.

Nehemiah 3:5

Next to them the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord. For the most part, people joined in - but not everybody. These nobles from the city of Tekoa thought they were above the hard work, so they did not join in. Literally, the idea in the Hebrew is that they would not submit - they would not 'bend their necks' to what the Lord wanted them to

do. The real issue was submission. Maybe they thought they had a better plan, maybe they did not like the way Nehemiah was doing it. Whatever their reason, the reader can be sure they later regretted it, because they stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in this chapter who did not join in the work. Perhaps Nehemiah wanted to record the names of each of these nobles, but the Lord made him have mercy and only indicate them in a general way, thus not bringing shame on their descendents: <<*The person who sins shall die. A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child; the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own*>> (Ezekiel 18:20).

The leading people of Tekoa, not far south of Jerusalem, may have resented Nehemiah's leadership. The Hebrew translated their Lord has the form of a plural, but the plural form is often used to express respect to a single master: for this construction in relation to God refer to Deuteronomy 10:17 ('Lord of lords'), Nehemiah 8:10 and 10:29, Psalm 8:1, 135:5, and 136:3; in relation to a man refer to Genesis 42:33 and Judges 3:25. In view of the use in Nehemiah, this probably refers to God; but perhaps the form, which could refer to Nehemiah, is used to convey the notion that one properly serves God by obeying Nehemiah.

The prophet Amos was a famous Tekoite: <<*The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake*>> (Amos 1:1). **He was a faithful servant of God and was not of noble birth but a shepherd or sheep owner.**

⁶ Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate; they laid its beams and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars. ⁷ Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite – the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah – who were under the jurisdiction of the governor of the province Beyond the River. ⁸ Next to them Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs; and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

Nehemiah 3:6-8

Joiada and Meshullam repaired the Old Gate. Among the repairers of the Old Gate and its nearby walls was Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths. Alongside him was Hananiah, one of the perfumers. These were men of different professions, not professional builders. They were not trained for this kind of work. It would have seemed they had an easy excuse to not do anything, but they joined in and did the work.

They restored Jerusalem, meaning they **fortified** it, even though many would not think them qualified or able. The most important ability in the work of the Lord is availability. The one with few gifts and little talent, who has a passion and a drive to see God's work done, will accomplish far more than a gifted and talented person who does not have they passion and drive to do the Lord's work.

Mizpah was an important administrative centre after the fall of Jerusalem: <<*In the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, at Mizpah. As they ate bread together there at Mizpah*>> (Jeremiah 41:1). Apparently the Samaritan governor of Beyond the River continued to hold sessions there.

Today the remains of the Broad Wall can be seen in Jerusalem, and broad it is, more than 20 feet or 6 metres wide and it enclosed part of the western city. Critics had denied the accuracy of Bible history like this, but archæologists constantly confirm the historical and social truth of the Bible.

⁹ Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. ¹⁰ Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house; and next to him Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs. ¹¹ Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. ¹² Next to him Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters.

Nehemiah 3:9-12

Next to them Rephaiah son of Hur. He worked on this section of the wall. Here was another leader who knew real leadership is getting down and doing it - being a servant, instead of expecting others to do it for you.

Ruler of half the district of Jerusalem. Similar expressions occur six times in vv.12-18, referring to an administrative system that divided the province into perhaps six sections.

Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. Five times in the Nehemiah Chapter 3, it speaks of those who worked on the section right in front of their own house. Often, people need to give attention to the work of God at their own homes. If the work needs to be done anywhere, it needs to be done near to home. There is a well known saying in Christian circles that God's mission may be on the other side of the world for some but for most it is just on the other side of the street.

The names of the men who are said to have made repairs in front of his house are interesting:

- Verse 10 mentions Jedaiah, and his name means ‘He who calls unto God’. Christian homes must be places of prayer, where the family calls unto God.
- Verse 23 mentions Benjamin, and his name means ‘Son of my right hand’, speaking of a protector. Christian homes must be places of protection and peace.
- Verse 29 mentions Zadok, and his name means ‘Justice’. Christian homes must be places of justice and integrity, especially with integrity regarding marital vows and promises.
- Verse 30 mentions Meshullam, and his name means ‘Devoted’. Christian homes must be places of devotion and separation to God.

Malchijah son of Harim. This man is mentioned in Ezra 10:31 as one of the men who was confronted by Ezra for the sin of taking on a pagan wife. That was many years before this, so Malchijah had clearly repented, was right with God and now, years later, he served him. A believer should never let a past failure get in the way of serving God. Repent, set it right, make a stand for righteousness and get on serving the Lord.

Shallum son of Hallohesh, he and his daughters. Everyone who could help did help in the repairs. With the great number of different people working on the walls, it was imperative that they all work with the same mind or the wall would not be uniform and would not be a strong defence. Yet, each section was a little different because different people worked on each section. In the same way, in the family of God, the work must be done with a common vision and mindset - the mind of Christ, as Paul described it: <<‘*For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?*’ *But we have the mind of Christ*>> (1 Corinthians 2:16). When believers work together in one accord, yet with each offering their distinctive gifts, the work of God gets done in a glorious way.

¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. ¹⁴ Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate; he rebuilt it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

Nehemiah 3:13-14

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired a thousand cubits of the wall. This was a stretch of about five hundred yards or 457m.

The Valley Gate was probably on the south western side of the city of David, and the Dung Gate, leading to the city dump, at its southern tip.

¹⁵ And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars; and he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David.

Nehemiah 3:15

Although not positively identified, the Fountain Gate was no doubt on the east side of the city where the Kidron Valley's water sources were.

The Pool of Shelah is a Hebrew variant for what was later known as the Pool of Siloam, which played an import role in Jesus restoring the sight to a blind man: <<*When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see*>> (John 9:6-7).

The king's garden. Charles Spurgeon preached a beautiful sermon on this text, where he spoke of six different gardens of the King: Eden, Gesthemane, the Garden Tomb, the human heart, the church as a whole, and the garden of Paradise in heaven.

The City of David. The part of the city originally occupied by David, extending south of what is now the Temple Mount.

¹⁶ After him Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired from a point opposite the graves of David, as far as the artificial pool and the house of the warriors. ¹⁷ After him the Levites made repairs: Rehum son of Bani; next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸ After him their kin made repairs: Binnui, son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah; ¹⁹ next to him Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armoury at the Angle. ²⁰ After him Baruch son of Zabbai repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of the high priest Eliashib. ²¹ After him Meremoth son of Uriah son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. ²² After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, made repairs. ²³ After them Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs opposite

their house. After them Azariah son of Maaseiah son of Ananiah made repairs beside his own house. ²⁴ After him Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the Angle and to the corner. ²⁵ Palal son of Uzai repaired opposite the Angle and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah son of Parosh ²⁶ and the temple servants living on Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. ²⁷ After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

Nehemiah 3:16-27

After him is the regular way of describing each successive group of builders in this section.

Nehemiah the son of Azbuk. This is a different Nehemiah, of course, as the introduction to this book clearly indicates: <<*The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah*>> (Nehemiah 1:1a).

The graves of David; the artificial pool and the house of the warriors. On the eastern side of the city, Nehemiah has to build a new line of wall, rather than simply repair the old one, because the pre-exilic wall was so badly destroyed here. The line of the new wall is now described in relation to a variety of features of the city, most of which can no longer be certainly located. It is positioned higher up the slope of the Kidron Valley than the old one.

The graves of David would refer to his own tomb and that of his descendants who were buried in the same complex. Both the OT and early Jewish tradition locate David's tomb on the south side of Jerusalem. The traditional tomb location is marked today by medieval Islamic and Christian buildings. Some suggest that this is where the earliest church met, e.g. Acts 2:44-45. Thus Peter may be referring to an earlier traditional tomb not far from where he was speaking.



David's Tomb in Jerusalem

The temple servants living on Ophel. The temple servants, Hebrew *netinim*, a term appearing only in Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 Chronicles 9:2, were a further, lower class of officials appointed by King David to help the Levites: <<*besides two hundred and twenty of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name*>> (Ezra 8:20). There may be a connection between them and the Gibeonites, whom Joshua made servants of the sanctuary: <<*Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God*>> (Joshua 9:23), <<*But on that day Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, to continue to this day, in the place that he should choose*>> (Joshua 9:27). Here, however, they are apparently not slaves, and in Nehemiah 10:28 they are named among those who take the covenant oath. Ophel is a name for the whole south eastern hill.

The Water Gate, in the old wall, had probably opened onto the Gihon Spring, the main water source outside the city wall.

The Tekoites repaired another section. The section of wall near the Water Gate saw some remarkable service. Apparently, the Tekoites were not satisfied with the significant work they had done before - they went on to do even more work. They were not going to let the bad example of their nobles who did not work (v.5) keep them from working above and beyond the call of duty.

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each one opposite his own house. ²⁹ After them Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. ³⁰ After him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his living quarters.

Nehemiah 3:28-30

Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs. This was a location near to the temple itself and it was only right that the priests should be involved in its repair. It was the place where Queen Athaliah was executed: <<*So they laid hands on her; she went through the horses' entrance to the king's house, and there she was put to death*>> (2 Kings 11:16).

Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. The East Gate may have been a gate into the temple rather than a gate in the wall.

Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. The Hebrew word for dwelling is actually chamber - it refers to a singular room. Meshullam had only one small room, yet he was devoted to God and to the work of

rebuilding the walls. It is better to be devoted to God in one small room than to have a mansion and have a heart cold to God.

³¹ After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper room of the corner. ³² And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

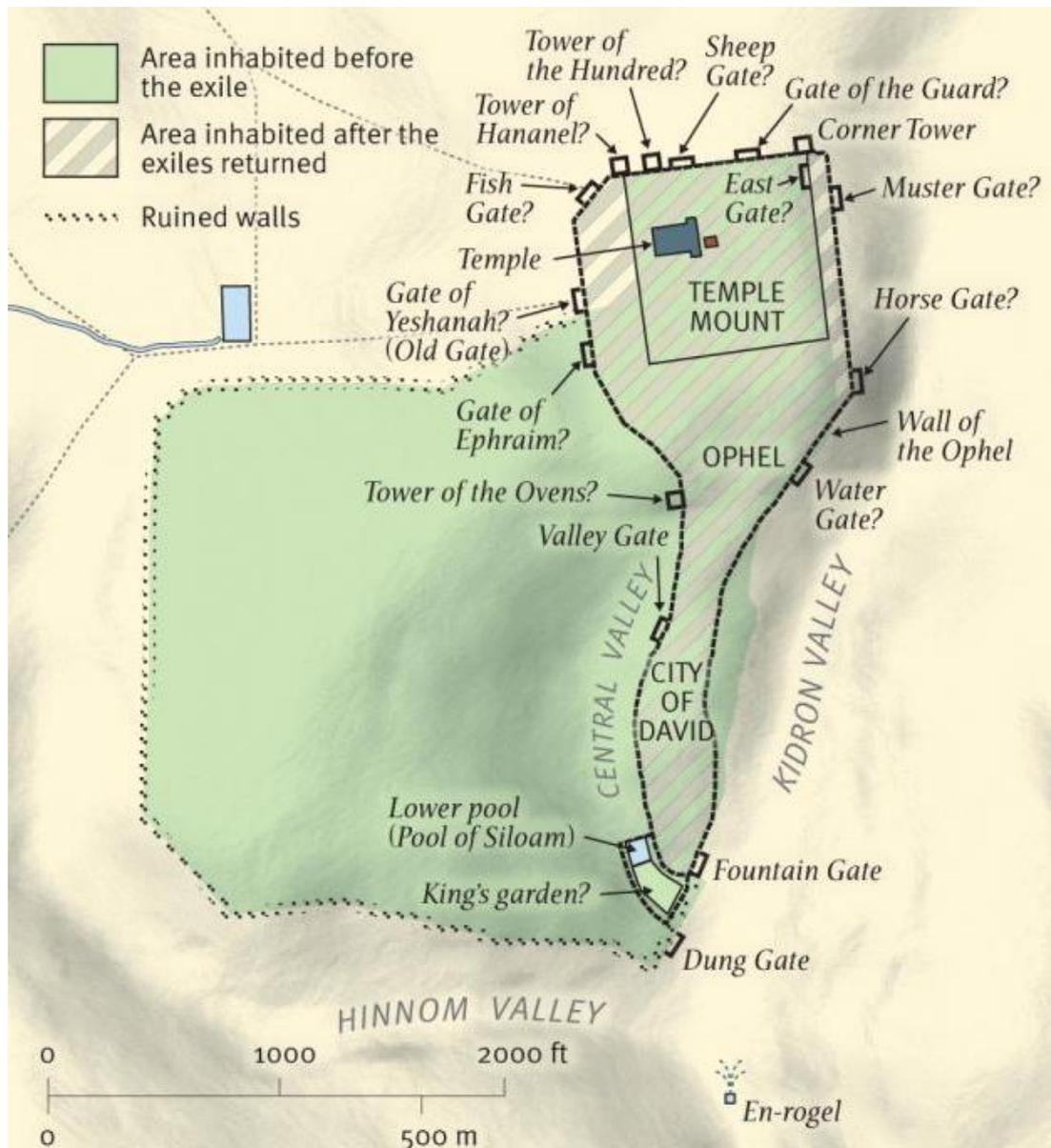
Nehemiah 3:31-32

And between the upper room of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs. The full circuit of the city has now been described; refer also to the comment made on vv.1-2.

Nehemiah was an effective leader because:

- He made each family leader accountable for his work. Each man and his team had a section of wall that he was responsible for, and it was known that he was responsible for it. No one wanted it to be seen that they were a poor worker in God's cause. By giving each man a sense of responsibility for the work helped ensure the work would be done correctly and to the best standard they could achieve with the skills and resources to hand. It made each man and team accountable.
- He noted who did the work and who did not - the list demonstrates this.
- He organised the work for maximum efficiency. Everyone had their section, and the work was organised around the gates - the places most in of the repair or replacing.
- He knew where to start. He began with the spiritual aspect of the work for the high priest's work is mentioned first, and by consecrating everything to God.
- He got both 'high' and 'low' in terms of social status to join together in doing the work. The leaders and the high priest worked together with the man who lived in a single room. Everyone is equal in God's sight and the church model should reflect this: <<*For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*>> (1 Corinthians 12:13), <<*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*>> (Galatians 3:28), and: <<*In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!*>> (Colossians 3:11).
- He was willing to let people try new things - goldsmiths, priests, and perfumers all became construction workers.

- He made people focus on their own neighbourhood first.
- He did not disqualify people because of a past sin or compromise.



Jerusalem at the Time of Nehemiah circa 445 BC

Although Nehemiah gives a careful listing of the sections of Jerusalem's walls that were rebuilt, it is difficult to be certain exactly which walls and gates he was referring to. The city had extended beyond the City of David and the Temple Mount by the time of Hezekiah, but it appears that only the Temple Mount and the City of David were enclosed within Nehemiah's walls. An ambitious project nevertheless, it was completed in only fifty two days, providing Jerusalem with some measure of protection from its enemies. More importantly it encouraged a spirit of community in the people of Jerusalem.