

Building for God: Preparations

Goldstone Church – 11-Oct-15 10:30am

Nehemiah 3:1-32

Introduction

Continuing our series looking at the book of Nehemiah. We're using Nehemiah as an analogy, learning how God wants us to be involved in building His kingdom. How does God want me to be involved in building His kingdom – building God's kingdom here at Goldstone church.

In Nehemiah 3 we learn how Nehemiah went about rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. And right away we have an analogy to apply and understand. If the walls of our lives are broken down, if our defences have crumbled and we're being attacked by the Devil from every side, then please note carefully the way that Nehemiah rebuilds the walls.

Notice also, two very interesting points:

- i. the people were willing to work, and
- ii. they got stuck-in, hands-on, involved straight away.

God prompts Nehemiah to get the people to work on the wall that was nearest to where they lived, and the people got personally involved in the work. The people became stakeholders and owned the project.

The chapter describes the building process, a building project that centred on the **Ten Gates** of the city of Jerusalem. Various groups and families are assigned a section of the city wall - sections that are identified by the gates that allowed access into the city. In English, we might not think very much about these 'gate names', but in Hebrew, the names are very significant.

Let's look at each of these 10 gates, and draw out how these names can help us rebuild the walls of our lives.

1. SHEEP GATE (Neh 3:1)

The Sheep Gate is where the sheep were brought into the city, then taken to the temple to be sacrificed on the altar. This gives us a parallel meaning – the Sheep Gate speaks of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed on the cross to pay the price for our sins. This is the essential aspect of the cross.

The cross at Calvary is always the starting point for strength in our Christian lives. The cross may be unpopular in our society, and is offensive in many cultures. But this is the truth: the cross puts to death our selflessness and highlights God's grace and love.

The cross is the place where we must begin if we are to rebuild the walls of our lives and build for strength.

2. FISH GATE (Neh 3:3)

The name of the Fish Gate reminds us of Jesus' words to His disciples, "*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17). What Jesus means by being "Fishers of men", is to be people that share what we believe with others; to be a Christian witness. And a witness is someone who's had a personal encounter with Jesus, and tells others what they have seen and experienced.

Has the wall crumbled around the Fish Gate in your life? If so, we are being called to have it rebuilt. As Christians, Jesus calls us be witnesses for Him. This is an essential part of being a Christian.

If this wall is broken down, speaking to others about our relationship with Jesus will be impossible. If this wall is broken, we need to rebuild the Fish Gate.

3. JESHANAH (OLD) GATE (Neh 3:6)

The Jeshanah Gate is also known as the Old Gate (see footnote in NIV Bible). This gate represents truth. If you think about it, 'truth' is always old.

We live in a society where 'old truth' is often labelled as 'old school', stale, fuddy-duddy, or past it's "sell by" date. Sadly, there is an increasing trend to throw away or compromise what Christian truth has always stood for.

The truth of Jesus Christ will never change; it will always be perfect. If we allow the truth to fade, then the walls of our life will begin to crumble and the enemy will come in. We need to be sure that the gates of truth are always in good repair.

4. VALLEY GATE (Neh 3:13)

The Valley Gate led to the plains on the west of the city, down to the sea. This is a low place, a place of humility.

The Bible has many verses about being humble. To be humble before God and to be humble before the people that we meet on a daily basis. Conversely, the Bible shows us that God is against the proud, against the self-promoting. To have the attitude in life, that what God wants, is more important than what I want.

To put it bluntly, if pride is a problem in our lives, then the Valley Gate urgently needs to be rebuilt.

5. DUNG GATE (Neh 3:14)

One name in this passage that needs extra respect is: Malkijah son of Rekab (v.14). Just think of it, through centuries of history, Malkijah has also been linked with the Dung Gate!

And just to be clear, yes, the Dung Gate was the place where all the rubbish, the filth and refuse was taken out.

Sometimes, without realising it, our lives collect and accumulate rubbish. And the more it stays around, the bigger the stink. In fact, if left unattended, the trash in our lives can make us stink-to-high-heaven in the sight of God and of man. If this gate is broken, none of the rubbish can be taken away. With God's help, we need to rebuild the Dung Gate and allow Him to clean away the dirty streets of our lives.

6. FOUNTAIN GATE (Neh 3:15)

The name of this gate reminds us of Jesus, when He spoke to the woman at the well, *"the water I give them will become in them a spring of water [or a fountain] welling up to eternal life."* (John 4:14b)

Jesus is referring to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is like an eternal, river-of-life that flows and empowers us through our daily lives. This is the fountain of life that enables us to obey what God asks us to do. This is an obedience that is placed in the context of our love relationship with our loving Saviour.

If we have a low expectation that the Holy Spirit will work in and through our lives, then the Fountain Gate needs to be repaired.

7. WATER GATE (Neh 3:26)

"Water" is used in a variety of figurative and symbolic ways in the Bible. But the undercurrent meaning in most passages, is that 'water' is referring to the "Word of God". For example, when Jesus spoke to the woman at the well (John 4), what Jesus actual says about eternal life is phrased using parallels with water.

Interestingly, the Water Gate is the only gate that did not need repairing. The text suggests, that this was the only part of the wall that was still standing. v.26 tells us who was living near the Water Gate, but doesn't say that it needed to be repaired.

At the risk of stretching an analogy, God's Word never breaks down and doesn't need to be repaired. But just like the Water Gate, God's Word needs to be used, and drawn upon and re-inhabited.

8. HORSE GATE (Neh 3:28)

On most occasions, when 'horses' are mentioned in the Bible, it is in the context of warfare and battle and opposition. For example, when the Egyptian horses & chariots are mentioned in the Old Testament, they are always mentioned when there is a fight about to happen – or has just happened.

Our fight isn't against physical horses; our battle is far greater. Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 6:12, says, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers,*

against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

The Horse Gate reminds us that, as Christians, we are in a spiritual battle. Which means that the Armour of God that is listed in Ephesians 6 - the Armour of God is not an optional extra. The Armour of God is essential in our daily lives. This is a battle!

9. EAST GATE (Neh 3:29)

Geographically, the East Gate faced the rising sun, and is considered as the gate of hope. It is the gate of anticipation; the gate of the certain hope that we have as Christians. A certain hope of what is to come when Jesus Christ returns at the end of time.

If your life seems filled with doom & gloom, and pessimism then you need to rebuild the East Gate in your life. We have a certain hope of the future because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

10. INSPECTION GATE (Neh 3:31)

The Inspection Gate (Muster Gate in some Bible versions), might be better called the 'Examination Gate'. This was the place where people brought their complaints, and where judgements were made about disputes.

The Inspection Gate challenges Christians to do an audit-check of our lives, to see if we have strayed away from God's purposes. We need to take an honest look at ourselves, re-evaluate what we are doing, and ensure that it is in line with what God wants.

And having paused and reflected on our lives, we come back again to the Sheep Gate – the gate of the cross. The cross must always be at the beginning and end of our lives.

Conclusion ...

Nehemiah 3 is hard going with all the unfamiliar names. But it is also a goldmine for teaching us what we need to focus on, to strengthen the walls in our spiritual lives.

The people with Nehemiah had the benefit of actually seeing the physical weaknesses in the walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem. But if we are honest, we know the areas of our lives that need attention. The Gates highlight the places in our spiritual lives that need to be rebuilt.

1. Reconnecting to the Lamb of God at the **Sheep Gate**.
2. The call to witness for God at the **Fish Gate**.
3. Maintaining God's unfailing truth at the **Old Gate**.
4. The need for humility at the **Valley Gate**.
5. Cleaning out rubbish through the **Dung Gate**.
6. The refreshment of Holy Spirit at the **Fountain Gate**.
7. Engaging with the Word of God at the **Water Gate**.
8. The spiritual warfare faced at the **Horse Gate**.
9. The certain hope of the **East Gate**.
10. The audit-check at the **Inspection Gate**.

It seems that everywhere needs some attention. But rather than being swamped by all the walls in the city, let's follow Nehemiah's template - and look at the nearest wall. Allow God to underline the one area that He wants to rebuild in your life.

AMEN

