

Nehemiah

Chapter 3

Rebuilding the Wall

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 Zaccur the son of Imri built. 3 The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. And next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. And next to them Zadok the son of Baana repaired. 5 And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord. 6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 7 And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. 8 Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. 10 Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. 11 Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahathmoab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters. 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. 14 Malchijah the son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 15 And Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set 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. 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. 17 After him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. 18 After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai the son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. 20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the 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, repaired. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. 24 After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh 26 and the temple servants

living on Ophel repaired 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. 28 Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. 29 After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. 30 After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah repaired opposite his chamber. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. 32 And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

3:1–32 One of the most important chapters in the OT for determining the topography of Jerusalem. The narrative begins at the Sheep Gate (northeast corner of the city) and proceeds in a counterclockwise direction around the wall. About 40 key men are named as participants in the reconstruction of about 45 sections. The towns listed as the homes of the builders may have represented the administrative centers of the province of Judah. Ten gates are named: (1) Sheep Gate (v. 1), (2) Fish Gate (v. 3), (3) Jeshanah Gate (v. 6), (4) Valley Gate (v. 13), (5) Dung Gate (v. 14), (6) Fountain Gate (v. 15), (7) Water Gate (v. 26), (8) Horse Gate (v. 28), (9) East Gate (v. 29), (10) Inspection Gate (v. 31). The account suggests that most of the rebuilding was concerned with the gates, where the enemy's assaults were always concentrated. Not all the sections of the walls or buildings in Jerusalem were in the same state of disrepair. A selective policy of destruction seems to be indicated by 2Ki 25:9. (CSB)

This account of the repair and rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem lists the names of many individuals and the specific places where they worked. The 41 work details represent various social and professional classes: the high priest and other priests, goldsmiths and perfumers, rulers of districts, Levites, temple servants, merchants. This is an important source of information for the political and social life of Judah in fifth century BC. From it, we have a better understanding of the geography of Jerusalem, though the exact location of the 9 gates and 18 other features mentioned cannot be identified with absolute certainty. However, enough of the topography is known to establish that the walls on the four sides of the city are described in the following order: north wall (vv 1–5), west wall (vv 6–12), south wall (vv 13–14), east wall (vv 15–32). The original line of the east wall had to be abandoned and a new wall built on the ridge overlooking the Kidron Valley. The systematic manner of the project reflects Nehemiah's stature and character. Also deserving recognition is the way the people shouted enthusiastically, "Let us ... build" (2:18), which showed they actually "had a mind to work" (4:6). (TLSB)

The list of workers demonstrates Nehemiah's careful preparation and organization. Each leader had his own area and responsibilities clearly outlined. The work was organized so that the whole wall could be built simultaneously. (PBC)

3:1 *Eliashib the high priest.* It was fitting that the high priest should set the example. Among the ancient Sumerians the king himself would carry bricks for the building of a temple. (CSB)

Nehemiah begins his description of the city at the northeast corner of the city, probably so that the high priest and his crew could be placed in the position of honor. The northern wall was the most important and required the heaviest fortifications, since the city had the poorest natural defenses in this direction. The city gates were not simply doors in the walls, but strong, roofed towers which contained a number of guardhouses inside. The gates were one of the most vital parts of the fortifications. (PBC)

Sheep Gate. It was known in NT times (Jn 5:2) as located near the Bethesda Pool (in the northeast corner of Jerusalem). Even today a sheep market is held periodically near this area. The Sheep Gate may have replaced the earlier Benjamin Gate (Jer 37:13; 38:7; Zec 14:10). (CSB)

Near the temple at the northeast corner of the city. Sheep to be sacrificed were driven through this gate. The survey of other sections of the wall begins here and proceeds in a counterclockwise direction around the city, ending where it began (v 32). (TLSB)

Eliashib worked on the Sheep Gate. This gate probably received its name from the sheep that were brought through it for sacrifices in the temple. This gate is mentioned in the NT in John 5:2, which states that the Pool of Bethesda was in the vicinity. It is interesting to note that all of the work from the Sheep Gate to the Fish Gate is described by the verb “rebuild” in 3:1-3 instead of “repair.” This may reflect the more complete destruction of the northern part of Jerusalem’s wall by the Babylonians, so that the northern part had to be “rebuilt,” whereas the parts that had not suffered such extensive damage could simply be “repaired.” (CC)

they consecrated it – We are told that the priests consecrated the section of the wall they rebuilt. This holy rite may have indicated their hope in the promised advent of the Messiah as they sanctified to the service of God this northern approach to the temple. (CC)

Gate received a priestly blessing because of its significant use. (TLSB)

Tower of the Hundred. See 12:39. “Hundred” may refer to (1) its height (100 cubits), (2) the number of its steps or (3) a military unit (cf. Dt 1:15). (CSB)

Probably guarded the north wall, direction from which attacks would most likely come. (TLSB)

Eliashib also rebuilt the wall to the Tower of Hundred, which is mentioned elsewhere in the OT only in Nehemiah 12:39. Together with the Tower of Hananel (3:1; 12:29), it most likely formed part of the temple citadel that Nehemiah’s brother Hanani commanded (7:2) The Tower of Hananel is mentioned also in Jeremiah 31:38 and Zechariah 14:10. Both of these passages mention the rebuilt tower as part of God’ eschatological work, and Jeremiah 31:38 is connected closely with the new covenant to be founded at the coming of the Messiah (Jer. 31:41-34). (CC)

Tower of Hananel. The towers were associated with the “citadel by the temple” (2:8) in protecting the vulnerable northern approaches to the city. (CSB)

3:2 *men of Jericho* – The contingent of workers from Jericho could not have been large since the men who resettled Jericho under Zerubbabel numbered only 345 (Ezra 2:34 / Nehemiah 7:36). (CC)

15 mi NE of Jerusalem in the Jordan Valley. (TLSB)

3:3 *Fish Gate.* During the days of the first temple, it was one of Jerusalem’s main entrances (2Ch 33:14; Zep 1:10). Merchants brought fish from either Tyre or the Sea of Galilee to the fish market (13:16) through this entrance, which may have been located close to the site of the present-day Damascus Gate. (CSB)

In the north wall, perhaps where a fish market was located. (TLSB)

The Fish Gate probably received its name from the fish taken from the Mediterranean, the Jordan, and or the Sea of Galilee that were brought to market through it. The fish sold in this market were likely dried or salted since the sources for fresh fish were probably too far away. Second Chronicles 33:14 states that King Manasseh (687-643 BC) had carried out a construction project in the area of the Fish Gate. Zephaniah 1:10 mentions the Fish Gate in conjunction with God's judgment on Jerusalem in a prophecy of Babylonian conquest. The fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy may be recorded in Jeremiah 39. Jeremiah 39:2-3 tells us that the Babylonians breached the city wall and the Babylonian commanders came and sat in the Middle Gate – probably another name for the Fish Gate, perhaps called that because it was between the Sheep Gate and the Old Gate. The Fish Gate may also be called the Corner Gate (2 Kings 14:13; Jeremiah 31:38; Zechariah 14:10; 2 Chron. 25:23; 26:9), since it is situated on the northwest corner of the city. (CC)

sons of Hassenaah – The citizens Senaah were assigned the task of rebuilding the Fish Gate. This apparently required the availability of an extensive labor pool, which Senaah was able to supply. Of all the outlying cities, Senaah had the highest number of men who came from Babylon with Zerubbabel: either 3630 in Ezra 2:35 or 3930 in Nehemiah 7:38. (CC)

3:4 Meremoth. Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, may be the Meremoth the son of Uriah who is called a priest in Ezra 8:33-34. That passage records how he inventoried the items Ezra brought which had been donated by Artaxerxes, and other for the temple. (CC)

Meshullam. Repaired a second section (v. 30). Nehemiah complained that Meshullam had given his daughter in marriage to a son of Tobiah. (CSB)

3:5 Tekoites. A small town about 6 miles south of Bethlehem and 11 miles from Jerusalem. It was the hometown of the prophet Amos. (CSB)

From Tekoa, 10 mi S of Jerusalem, home of Amos (Am 1:1). Cf v 27. (TLSB)

It is near the area controlled by Geshem the Arab. This may be the reason why the nobles were unwilling to build the wall. (CC)

nobles. The Hebrew for this word is different from that in 2:16 (see note there) and means “mighty” or “magnificent” (see 10:29; 2Ch 23:20; Jer 14:3). These aristocrats disdained manual labor. (CSB)

Possibly Geshem the Arab (2:19) had influenced them not to help. (TLSB)

would not stoop. Lit. “back of the neck.” The expression is drawn from the imagery of oxen that refuse to yield to the yoke (Jer 27:12). (CSB)

Lord. Refers either to the Lord God or to an earthly lord such as Nehemiah. (TLSB)

3:6 Gate of Yeshanah. In the northwest corner. Its name has been interpreted to mean Old Gate (see NIV text note), or gate to Jeshanah (lying on the border between Judah and Samaria, 2Ch 13:19), or as a corruption of *Mishneh* (the Hebrew word for “New Quarter”; see Zep 1:10) Gate. In any case, it may be another name for the Gate of Ephraim (see 12:39), which otherwise is not mentioned in ch. 3. (CSB)

Northwest corner; sometimes translated “Old Gate.” (TLSB)

It is likely that this gate was also called the Ephraim Gate (2 Ki. 14:13; Neh. 8:16; 12:39; 2 Chron. 25:23). (CC)

3:7 men of Gibeon and of Mizpah – Both are well-known cities in the OT. Nehemiah 7:25 reports that 95 men returned to Gibeon under Zerubbabel. Men from Mizpah about 9 miles north of Jerusalem, also worked on two other sections of the wall (3:15, 19). (CC)

C 6 mi NW of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Near Gibeon; Babylonian administrative center of Judah following the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC (Jer 40:10, 12). (TLSB)

seat of the governor. Lit. “throne,” which symbolizes authority here. (CSB)

The “seat of the governor of Across the River” appears to be a place near the west side of the wall of Jerusalem. It probably refers to the residence of the governor when he came to conduct official business in the city. (CC)

3:8 goldsmiths. See vv. 31–32. (CSB)

perfume-makers. See 1Sa 8:13. (CSB)

Broad Wall. In 1970–71 archaeological excavations in Jerusalem uncovered such a wall west of the temple area. It is dated to the early seventh century B.C. and was probably built by Hezekiah (2Ch 32:5). The expansion to and beyond the Broad Wall may have become necessary because of the influx of refugees fleeing from the fall of Samaria in 722–721. (CSB)

Location unknown. May be a separate wall running to the west. (TLSB)

3:9 ruler of half the district. Apparently the province was divided into five districts, which were further subdivided. (TLSB)

3:10 Jedaiah ... made repairs opposite his house. It made sense to have him and others repair the sections of the wall nearest their homes. (CSB)

Beginning in this verse with the work of Jedaiah, we are told that it was common to assign crews to work near their own houses in the city. Others who did this were Benjamin and Hassub (2:23); Azariah (3:24); the priests (3:28); Zadok (3:29); and perhaps Meshullam (3:30). (CC)

3:11 Tower of the Ovens. It was on the western wall, perhaps in the same location as one built by Uzziah (2Ch 26:9). The ovens may have been those situated in the “street of the bakers” (Jer 37:21). (CSB)

Along the west wall; used either for baking or firing pottery. (TLSB)

This may have been situated near the bakers’ street that supplied Jeremiah with bread during his confinement in the Courtyard of the Guard (Jer. 37:21). (CC)

3:12 daughters. A unique reference to women working on the wall. When the Athenians attempted to rebuild their walls after the Persians had destroyed them, it was decreed that “the whole population of the city—men, women and children—should take part in the wall-building” (Thucydides, 1.90.3). (CSB)

The only mention of women joining in the work are the daughters of Shallum in this verse. However, it would be an argument from silence (the weakest form of argument) to assume that no other women helped in the effort. (CC)

3:13 Valley Gate. One group, that of Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah, is said to have repaired a large portion of the wall: The Valley Gate and 1000 cubits (about 1500 feet or 500 meters) of the wall between the Valley Gate and the Dung Gate. This portion is larger by far than that covered any other work crew. This may be an indication that this portion of the wall had already been substantially rebuilt in the first effort a few years earlier (Ezra 4:11-23). (CC)

These verses describe the wall running along the western edge of Ophel. The Valley Gate, the gate used by Nehemiah on his inspection trip, opened out onto the Tyropoean Valley, the valley which divided Ophel from Mt. Zion. (PBC)

a thousand cubits. An extraordinary length; probably most of the section was relatively intact. (CSB)

3:14 Dung Gate – Malchijah the son of Recab, who repaired the Dung Gate, was administrator of a district around Beth-Hakkerem, a town that is also mentioned in Jer. 6:1. It is generally agreed that the Dung Gate lay at the extreme southern end of the city facing the Hinnom Valley, which was used as a dump for refuse. In the pre-exilic period, “the Valley of (the Son of) Hinnom,” was the site of some of the worst forms of idolatry, including the sacrificial burning of children (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 7:31-32; 32:35; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6). By the NT era, Gehenna, the Greek transliteration, became a term for hell (e.g., Mt. 5:22-, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33). (CC)

Beth Hakkerem. Means “house of the vineyard.” It was a fire-signal point (Jer 6:1) and is identified with Ramat Rahel, two miles south of Jerusalem. It may have been the residence of a district governor in the Persian period. (CSB)

3:15 Fountain Gate. These verses describe the wall running along the eastern side of Ophel and the temple mount, overlooking the Kidron Valley. (PBC)

This is the only gate that is said to have a roof, perhaps to shade the many people who came through it to reach the pools in the vicinity. (CC)

Pool of Siloam. Perhaps the Lower Pool of Isa 22:9. (CSB)

That name may come from the serpentine tunnel constructed by Hezekiah that connected the Pool of Siloam with the Gihon Spring (see 2 Kings 20:20). (CC)

This was a large reservoir of water brought from a nearby spring by tunnel and aqueduct. (PBC)

King’s Garden. Closely connected with the Pool of Siloam is the King’s Garden. Apparently some of the water from the Pool of Siloam was diverted to water this garden, which is mentioned in the narrative of the attempt by Zedekiah and his soldiers to flee Nebuchadnezzar’s army (2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:4; 52:7). (CC)

City of David. Steps probably led down from Ophel through the Fountain Gate to En-rogel (2:13-15). (TLSB)

3:16 *district of Beth-zur.* A district capital, 13 miles south of Jerusalem. Excavations in 1931 and 1957 revealed that occupation was sparse during the early Persian period but was resumed in the fifth century B.C. (CSB)

tombs of David. Cf. 2:5. David was buried in the city area (1Ki 2:10; 2Ch 21:20; 32:33; Ac 2:29). The so-called Tomb of David on Mount Zion venerated today by Jewish pilgrims is in the Coenaculum building, erected in the 14th century A.D. Such a site for David's tomb is mentioned no earlier than the ninth century A.D. (CSB)

Where kings in David's family were buried. (TLSB)

artificial pool – The second landmark is the Artificial Pool, which may be the same as the King's Pool, beyond which Nehemiah could not inspect the wall (2:14). (CC)

house of mighty men. May have been the house of David's mighty men (see 2Sa 23:8–39), which perhaps served later as the barracks or armory. (CSB)

3:17–18 *Keilah.* Located about 15 miles southwest of Jerusalem, it played an important role in David's early history (1Sa 23:1–13). (CSB)

Four work crews made up of Levites (Temple workers) are listed in two sets (3:17-19). The first set of the two Levite crews is linked by "beside him" (3:17) instead of the customary "after him" that links the rest of crews on the east side of the city. This unexpected variation in formula joins these two Levite crews together. Two more Levite crews are identified as "relatives" of the first two, and they are also joined in a pair using "beside him" instead of "after him" (3:18-19).

3:19 *armory.* Storage place for weapons, perhaps located at an abutment projecting from the east wall. (TLSB)

The landmark "the Ascent of the Armory (at) the Angle," cannot be identified with any certainty. "The Ascent of the Armory" was probably a staircase in the city. "The Angle" appears to be the name of two different places; the other location so labeled is in Nehemiah 3:24-25. (CC)

3:20–21 The residences of the high priest and his fellow priests were located inside the city along the eastern wall. (CSB)

Starting in 3:20, a series of work crew assignments are located primarily by the private dwellings next to them. At least eight of the last sixteen sections in the list are noted as being next to someone's dwelling (3:20, 21, 23 [twice], 24, 25, 28-29). This would seem to indicate that the population of Jerusalem was mainly concentrated on the east side of the City of David, except for the priests, whose dwellings were north of the Ophel in the temple precinct (3:28-29). (CC)

3:23 *Azariah* – One with this name is listed among the Levites who helped the people understand the Law (8:7). (TLSB)

3:25 *upper house*. Perhaps the old palace of David (see 12:37). Like Solomon’s palace, it would have had a guardhouse (Jer 32:2). (CSB)

Probably refers to area where royal palace once stood. (TLSB)

3:26 *Ophel*. See v. 27. The word means “swelling” or “bulge,” hence a (fortified) “hill,” specifically the northern part of the southeastern hill of Jerusalem, which formed the original City of David, just south of the temple area (2Ch 27:3). (CSB)

Knoll on hill where original city of David stood, south of the temple area (2 Sam. 5:9; 2 Chron. 33:14). (TLSB)

Water Gate. So called because it led to the main source of Jerusalem’s water, the Gihon spring. It must have opened onto a large area, for the reading of the Law took place there (8:1, 3, 16; 12:37). (CSB)

Entrance in the east wall that probably led to Gihon Spring. (TLSB)

projecting tower. Perhaps the large tower whose ruins were discovered by archaeologists on the crest of the Ophel hill in 1923–25. Excavations at the base of the tower in 1978 revealed a level dating to the Persian era. (CSB)

3:28-30 Most of those who worked on the wall east of the temple complex were priests. (CC)

3:28 *Horse Gate*. Where Athaliah was slain (2Ch 23:15). It may have been the easternmost point in the city wall—a gate through which one could reach the Kidron Valley (Jer 31:40). (CSB)

Entrance for cavalry, overlooked Kidron Valley. (TLSB)

own house – Priests living in this area each worked near his own house. (TLSB)

3:29 *East Gate*. May have been the predecessor of the present Golden Gate. (CSB)

The Horse Gate (3:28) and the Muster Gate (3:31) are mentioned as reference points, and one of builders is identified as a keeper of the East Gate (3:29). These were gates in the temple complex, not in Jerusalem’s wall. The Horse Gates connected the temple to the royal palace complex (2 Kings 11:16; 2 Chron. 23:15). The keepers of the East Gate were Levites (2 Chron. 31:14). The gate to the temple complex played a prominent role in Ezekiel’s vision of the Jerusalem temple defiled by idolatry shortly before its destruction by the Babylonians (Ezek. 10:19; 11:1) and in his eschatological vision of the new temple in the everlasting Jerusalem (Ezek. 40:6-16; cf. Rev. 21:22). (CC)

3:31 *goldsmiths*. The word may signify smiths, or persons who worked in metals of any kind; but it is generally understood to mean those who worked in gold.

Muster Gate. Near north end of the east wall, perhaps the place where the temple or palace guard assembled (2 Chron. 32:6). (TLSB)

chamber of the corner – May have been a lookout point with a good view to the north.
(TLSB)

3:32 Sheep Gate. Back to the point of departure (see v. 1). (CSB)

In this chapter God has illustrated the basic principles of success.

1. The principle of coordination. Each person knew where he belonged.
2. The principle of cooperation. Men from different places and walks of life worked together on the wall.
3. The principle of commendation. He paid the workers and took a personal interest in them.
4. The principle of completion. Each person completed the task assigned to him. The words “built” and “repaired” are in the perfect tense. (Nehemiah and the dynamics of effective leadership)

Ch 3 The Judeans eagerly begin work on the walls and gates of Jerusalem under Nehemiah’s able leadership. God’s people still today have civic duties to fulfill, sharing in the burdens of their family and neighbors. As the Lord gives you strength, support the good works of others, which creates life and improves its quality. The Lord Jesus, who passed through the gates of Jerusalem, will sanctify your service through the blessings of His Word and in answer to your prayers. • Open to me, O Lord, the gates of heaven, that I may enter there by Your grace alone. Amen.
(TLSB)