

## CONTEMPORARY LESSONS IN SERVICE FROM MALKIJAH

### Nehemiah 3

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Nehemiah 3:1–32 (NIV)

“Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them. The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors. The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah—Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth—places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. Adjoining this, Jadaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters. The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun

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and residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate. The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over and putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David. Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool and the House of the Heroes. Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. Next to him, the repairs were made by their countrymen under Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the ascent to the armory as far as the angle. Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest. Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it. The repairs next to them were made by the priests from the surrounding region. Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. Next to him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from Azariah's house to the angle and the corner, and Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the angle and the tower projecting from the upper palace near the court of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiiah son of Parosh and the temple servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the projecting tower. Next to them, the men of

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Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall of Ophel. Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs. Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner; and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.”

Our Scripture today is found in the third chapter of Nehemiah. It presents a real test for us as to Paul’s statement “All scripture is inspired of God and is profitable.”

I’ve also invited a “guest” speaker to come today. He, from twenty-four hundred years back, is going to share with you, a modern audience, his perspectives on Christian service based upon the chapter which we have read today.

#### **Malkijah Speaks:**

I, Malkijah am the last person named in Nehemiah 3. I, along with thirty-six others of the rebuilders of the walls of Jerusalem are here named. I’ve been disappointed with how persons of Jewish and Christian faith have received this chapter over the years. I know that many of you have had the unfortunate event of trying to find God’s will from the Scripture and opened the Scripture to Nehemiah 3. How tragic that you should treat my name with disgust all these years when actually I’m one of the heroes of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. I’m a lay person. In all of twenty-four hundred years, no one has ever preached a sermon about me. Not one.

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I noticed your building trade is much different from mine. If we'd had lovely bricks, machine made in the rebuilding of the wall, how more rapidly our repairs could have gone. You have Caterpillars and earthmovers, and we had pick-axes and wheelbarrows, and straw baskets we carried on our shoulders. Your age in some years is more advanced technologically than ours but I'm not sure that it is advanced in human and spiritual values.

Lest you think that I come from a primitive time, I must remind you that just during my lifetime Socrates and Plato were alive in Athens. I come from an age when the people of God had made their way out of captivity back to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, our walls and our gates had been down one hundred forty years following Babylon' conquest. They had been down until Nehemiah came. I speak on Christian service based on our experience of building the walls. One thing for sure you must know is your importance as an individual. Perhaps this chapter is boring to you. It is boring because it is filled with names, and names, while familiar for me to pronounce because they were my friends and compatriots, are difficult for you because they come from another culture and another time. These names for me are the table of the heroes of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. We were so significant as individual persons that our names were inscribed in a record. I must remind you of God's great truth.

But who am I to remind you of God's great truth when you have more of God's truth than we did for centuries before Him, the Messiah. Need I remind you that names are important to God. That just as Nehemiah 3 is important to those of us who were the heroes of the rebuilding of the walls so God Himself has a record called the Book of Life in which are inscribed the names of all His people. That book is exciting to God, very fulfilling to God, for it is the book that contains the

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names of those for whom His Son gave His life. Names are significant to Him and He wants your name in a book, the Book of Life.

May I remind you also that there is a record of reward? If you're a Christian, the apostle Paul also indicates that God keeps a record not only of your eternal life, but also a record of your Christian service as well. And even as a record has been faithfully preserved in Scripture of our attempt of the rebuilding of the wall, so Saint Paul says of those who work for the Lord, the Messiah, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has build survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:11–15, NIV). Here Saint Paul is telling you of the Christian era that God is aware of what your service is to Him. And that that service is monitored in one of two categories—a service that stands good and is accorded recognition in the eternal place. Or a recognition which passes because it was not built substantially.

So I must ask you in talking to you in terms of your importance as an individual—is your name recorded? Is your name in any book that God keeps? Or is your name in any book that the people of God keep here on earth? Can your name be found with God in heaven and can your name be found and located with His people here on earth? Is your name in the Book of Life? And is your name in the record of the church on earth? There are some people strangely in your culture who do not believe it is important to have their name associated in a regular and tangible way with the people of God. We have some of those people who were looking at us rebuild the walls of

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Jerusalem and were always looking for something exotic and fulfilling. But the wall was not built by them. It was built by those of us who had a mind to work.

I see that some of you have let your name go in the record of the book on earth in terms of something you call a church directory. How marvelous. Something full of names. You have sufficient commitment that your name is somewhere here. Or a record of contributors to the church. The pastor is not allowed to see in this book and does not see in this book. It might be helpful to wonder whether your name is written on some kind of record in terms of your involvement in the kingdom of God.

Are you a member and is your name recorded in some task or mission group or ministry within the body of Christ? I must say to you and your leadership that you must take records seriously. Even as we took records seriously. For the recording of things is not simply an exercise. It is a way of locating people and following them up and being concerned about them. The church must keep proper records. Is your name recorded in rebuilding?

In taking your importance as an individual, may I simply ask you what accomplishment is attached to your name? The walls that we built were much easier than the walls that you build. The walls that we built could be seen. They rose. They were physical and tangible. The walls of Christian service which you are called to build are mostly labor with people, labor with ministry, laboring on things that may not be so easily seen or measured. Therefore your results are more difficult to survey. But maybe one indication of your ability to survey those results could be for you to consider that if you came before the Lord today and He only asked one question of you and it was this question, how would you respond? "What in My kingdom on earth depends upon you?" Knowing how to successfully answer that would be an indication to me that you are a

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worker on the walls. If that question draws a blank in your mind it could send you to prayer to consider what in the Lord's kingdom does depend upon you.

Have you noticed also in this chapter that the word "next" in your language occurs twenty-seven times? That this is so descriptive of how we rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem; we were together and we knew who was in front of us, we knew who was beside us on our right and on our left. There is this sense too in which we recognize still in doing the work of God that we do not accomplish anything for God alone. We accomplish for God when we know who is on our right and who is on our left. Who is working with us in our task of Christian stewardship?

Might I say also of your importance as an individual that you should ask yourself continually this question in terms of your involvement with the body of Christ on earth: "If my action and attitude were universal, if it were practiced by all, what would be the end result for God's work on earth?" We had to ask ourselves that question in the rebuilding of the walls. We recognize when we ask ourselves that question that Nehemiah, great leader though he was, was nothing without us. Nehemiah would have simply been an exercise in futility had we not been there to lend our shoulders and hands to the task of rebuilding the walls. Do you know that you are important as individuals? That this chapter in your Bible is an indication of the importance that God places on you as a human personality? And do you know as well that verse 31 of chapter 3 is my very favorite verse in all the Bible? I am important as a person. God keeps record of me and so does His body.

This opportunity of speaking to you from centuries ago gives me the privilege too of talking to you about the importance of leadership. Perhaps here I can say some things that your pastor may not feel at home in saying. Your pastor needs help. He is not the same quality of leader as Nehemiah. Nehemiah had the advantage of watching king Artaxerxes, the supreme administrator

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of the Medo-Persian empire, govern his affairs. Your pastor was trained in seminary, in theology, not administration. He knows precious little about it. Nehemiah had the opportunity to be trained at the very best and at a more mature age of life as well than your pastor. You must be considerate of his shortcomings when you compare him to Nehemiah.

But a word or two to your pastor: There is an importance of spiritual vision. I understand that you have in your day what's called the "Peter Principle." That is, that leaders rise to their level of incompetence. So often when a leader has risen to his level of incompetence and he has the responsibility for a ministry to people, the people then cannot themselves rise beyond that level of incompetence. That was our state for one-hundred forty years. With the walls broken down and the gates burned with fire the reason why the city stayed in that condition was not because there were not people who would have pitched in and worked. The reason why was because in that one-hundred forty years primarily there was not leadership. Not might I add, was it God's time. But it takes leadership for spiritual vision to be announced and for people to be stirred and motivated to act. Here you will know that this was Nehemiah's supreme gift—his ability with the help of the Spirit of God to motivate every one of us to put our hands to the wall. It is one thing for your leader to have a vision of something that should be done, but quite another thing to get other people involved in working on that vision.

Might I also say that even if Nehemiah, with all of his great ability to motivate, had not had people who wanted to be motivated, it would have been an impossible task. For we have yet to discover in all of these centuries as one of my contemporaries found out, you cannot motivate a corpse. He attempted to make it stand up and came to the conclusion that you cannot make a corpse stand up.

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Nehemiah delegated responsibility and authority. He was not an insecure leader who had to run around and do everything himself. He very carefully laid us out in work parties. The work parties numbered forty-one as they worked around the wall in counter-clockwise fashion. Beginning with the North Gate, the Sheep Gate, and around all the way back, Nehemiah delegated to us the authority and the responsibility to each complete our section of work and not only that, he recognized various talents that were in us so that to some he gave more work and to others he gave less.

And he recognized us you can see by the recording of names. He knew who was working on the wall. If you notice the name that is missing in this chapter you'll notice another clue to Nehemiah's being a great leader. His own name is missing from the chapter. That is an indication simply of the way Nehemiah was among us. Supporting us and encouraging us and not seeking, as the Messiah says, to Lord it over the flock.

Your leader, his vision, his ability to motivate, his ability to delegate responsibility and authority to recognize and to support, all of these qualities are critical in him. When in his leadership role your pastor fails to adequately demonstrate some of these capabilities, would you help him by counseling him as many of you have done, and perfecting him in his ministry as well?

I must remind you, in case you have not seen it in this chapter, of the importance of the participation of every one whom God calls. Your apostle Paul says that not all persons have the same function. That is certain indicated by our historical record on the work of the walls of Jerusalem. You will find this individuality and participation in Nehemiah 3. Have you noticed that as the chapter began who led the work? It was Eliashib the high priest. Here was the person in our community who was the most spiritually mature. Did he set back and wait for those who were younger in their spiritual faith to initiate the work, saying, "We old folks must sit back and

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let the young folks do it”? No, not at all. He, being in the place of spiritual maturity, initiated the lead and took the gate which was logical to him and to his family. It was the Sheep Gate, the gate in which the sacrificial animals entered on their way to the temple to be sacrificed by the high priest. That wall, that gate must be repaired first because that was the gate through which worship and sacrifice must come. So in participation our spiritually mature set the example for us. Those who had been in the faith the longest took the lead. So beautiful was Eliashib’s example; you must recognize this as you read on in the chapter. When you come to verse 20 you note that someone else worked on the wall that was at the high priest’s home. Eliashib went out on another part of the city to work on the Sheep Gate and left his own house that he might demonstrate his position as the leader for the community working at the Sheep Gate, the place of the sacrifice. We made it up to Eliashib by caring in this practical concern for him.

Notice also that of those who participated in the rebuilding of the wall, many of them did not directly benefit from their efforts. There were men from Jericho who came the long distance of a day’s journey. There were men who came from Tekoa and Gibeon and Mizpah, all of whom were residents not of our city, none who would take advantage of the rebuilding of our walls. But they wanted to join us in participating with us in doing something that was wonderful for the name of God. I understand that there are ventures that you participate in from which you do not directly receive benefits. Such as your prayer and your giving to missions. You follow the example of these, my compatriots, who themselves gave of their time and talent and effort on something they did not directly benefit from.

Then of course, we do have examples in our record of the rebuilding of the wall from persons who directly benefited. There were people who rebuilt the wall that was next to their house. They

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all these years had let that wall by their own house go and hadn't done anything on it. They only began to work on the walls of their own house when they saw everyone else get to work.

How much that is akin to the moving of the Spirit of God among you. That you may tolerate some sort of decay in your own home life and in your own family structure and for years not do anything about it until with one fresh breath of the Spirit of God all of you begin to work, patterning yourself after the example of Christ. Then all of you together may do the work. It is in community something far different than one person simply doing their own thing isolated. How much easier it is when we all begin moving together.

Have you noticed also the participation by persons of varying ability? Have you seen for example that in verse 6 it took two men to repair one gate, yet in verse 14 one man repaired a gate? In other words, one man was capable of doing more work and what one man could do in one instance two men needed to do in another instance. That suggests to us that you should not measure anyone's work by comparing them with someone else, but by seeing whether or not what they are doing compares with the ability that God has given to them.

Have you noticed that as much recognition is given to those who did much as to those who did little? Did you see that one team repaired five hundred yards of the wall? And they are given the same recognition as the one man who repaired the Dung Gate, a small little gate. Both did their part.

Did you notice also that there was participation by persons who discarded legitimate excuses? I, for example, am a goldsmith by trade. As a goldsmith along with others you will see that we do and not dirty our hands with bricks. We must keep our hands tender and clean to work with the fine precision of the jewelry associated with God. And you must notice the perfume maker. We have good excuses, excluded by our occupations from doing menial labor like carrying a basket

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and throwing dirt around and making bricks and walls. And what about the Levites and priests.

And all the merchants. But the tremendous thing about our adventure was that everybody pitched in and no one said, “I’m not qualified to do that.” But each had a mind to work.

And there were some of us who worked on the wall who could have used their leaders as an excuse not to. Verse 5 says the men of Tekoa did work but their nobles did not lend their

shoulders to the work. Their nobles, their wealthy people, their upper class did not do anything.

But these men of Tekoa, this outside city of Jerusalem did not let that discourage them from working. In fact, they come back and do even more. In verse 27, when they’re done with one part of the wall, they come back and repair another part of the wall. They don’t let the bad example of some divert them from work, saying, “When they begin to work I’ll do something. When I see them move then I’ll move.” How much labor in the kingdom of God has been frustrated because we let the poor example of someone else become a reason for our noninvolvement?

And there was Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph. He has five older brothers and they were “too good” to do the work and their names are not recorded in the chapter. He didn’t follow the example of his older brothers. He gave himself to the work.

And you see persons who even had the excuse of being the wrong sex. We had women’s liberation long before you. Women worked with us on the wall. They didn’t simply say, “That’s a man’s job and I’m not going to do it.” We should follow the calling which God puts upon us and believe that if He has called us to do it, it matters not whether we are man or woman.

Recognize also that in rebuilding the walls there were persons who went beyond the call of duty.

In verse 20 you’ll notice Baruch zealously repaired the walls. Everyone was working hard but there are just some people that when they work are extra nimble and extra light and extra happy.

That’s just the way Baruch was.

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Not only that, but there were some working on the wall near the Sheep Gate, the starting out point, who finished early and doubled back and worked on other parts of the wall.

All of these persons participated.

You must know the importance of God's ways for accomplishing his work. When he calls a whole group of people to do something he gives you a task bigger than can be accomplished by one individual. One person could never have rebuilt those walls in Jerusalem. One person can never build the ministry of this church. One person can never build the work of Christ in this community. One person can never build the work of the Lord in your neighborhood. It takes many of us coming together to do the Lord's work. Whenever the Lord calls us together then he begins organizing us for the task. Even as Nehemiah sometimes in taking a major task we need to break it down into segments so that we can approach it and accomplish it.

The Lord in our day worked with the available and he willing. I understand he still operates by those same principles. If you will make yourself available to Him and if you will be willing to do what He puts within your heart or what your leaders call you to do then it will be well. The wall which you build as a people will be built as well. Maybe it cannot be built in fifty-two days as were our walls, because again your walls are different. But they will be built nevertheless. One day there will be a record of you even as here is a record of us—a record of us that says in Nehemiah 3 that in the middle of the fifth century before the Messiah here was the party that rebuilt the walls. Someday in eternity you will see a record on another page in God's book, a book beyond this book which gives the register of those who rebuilt the walls of the Lord's ministry in this community. Will your name be in that register?

**Malkijah now is gone and I'm back. I hope this gave you a little perspective of what is involved in Christian service.**

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#### Closing Prayer

It's refreshing, Lord, to look at this chapter in a day when we're so success oriented that we count people in hundreds and thousands. It's great to see anew that you number us by name. That You count us as individuals. That in Your great Kingdom none of us are lost. None of us are shunted aside. But you take note of who we are and what we're doing and commend, sometimes rebuke. Lord, it does take many of us working together to make Your work possible. I pray that for our congregation that there will be exemplified in these days what was seen in this beautiful portrait of Nehemiah's work. That many people came together and did Your work with a whole heart. Give me, Lord, extra special ability in the Spirit to lead beyond my training and my inclinations, my background, my limitations, and to do the work which You're calling me to do. Give us all, Lord Jesus, the Spirit of faith and courage to mount up and to work with You and for You. Lord, too, I know that the most important record that You have is the Book of Life. When we come to You, You inscribe our names in the Book of Life. I want to thank You for inscribing my name there, and each of us whose name is in Your record rejoices, because they are there by Your efforts through Christ, and not our own. If there be one person here today who has never opened their life to You to be involved in Your record of life I pray that this day their heart will become open to You and that eternal life will invade their heart and life. We thank You for every good thing. We thank You Lord Jesus for Your Word, which speaks to us a new this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.