

CHAPTER 3

Saying and doing are often two things: many are ready to say, "Let us rise up and build," who sit still and do nothing, like that fair-spoken son who said, "I go, Sir, but went not." The undertakers here were none of those. As soon as they had resolved to build the wall about Jerusalem they lost no time, but set about it presently, as we find in this chapter. Let it never be said that we left that good work to be done to-morrow which we might as well have done to-day. This chapter gives an account of two things: —

I. The names of the builders, which are recorded here to their honour, for they were such as herein discovered a great zeal for God and their country, both a pious and a public spirit, a great degree both of industry and courage; and what they did was fit to be thus largely registered, both for their praise and for the encouragement of others to follow their example.

II. The order of the building; they took it before them, and ended where they began. They repaired,

1. From the sheep-gate to the fish-gate (v. 1, 2).
2. Thence to the old-gate (v. 3-5).
3. Thence to the valley-gate (v. 6-12).
4. Thence to the dung-gate (v. 13, 14).
5. Thence to the gate of the fountain (v. 15).
6. Thence to the water-gate (v. 16-26).
7. Thence by the horse-gate to the sheep-gate again, where they began (v. 27-32), and so they brought their work quite round the city.

NEHEMIAH 3:1-32

THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL

The best way to know how to divide this chapter is to observe how the work was divided among the undertakers, that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it accordingly with a holy emulation, and desire to excel, yet without any contention, animosity, or separate interest. No strife

appears among them but which should do most for the public good. Several things are observable in the account here given of the building of the wall about Jerusalem: —

I. That Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests, led the van in this troop of builders, v. 1. Ministers should be foremost in every good work; for their office obliges them to teach and quicken by their example, as well as by their doctrine. If there be labour in it, who so fit as they to work? if danger, who so fit as they to venture? The dignity of the high priest was very great, and obliged him to signalize himself in this service. The priests repaired the *sheep-gate*, so called because through it were brought the sheep that were to be sacrificed in the temple; and therefore the priests undertook the repair of it because *the offerings of the Lord made by fire were* their inheritance. And of this gate only it is said that *they sanctified it* with the word and prayer, and perhaps with sacrifices perhaps,

1. Because it led to the temple; or,

2. Because with this the building of the wall began, and it is probable (though they were at work in all parts of the wall at the same time) that this was first finished, and therefore at this gate they solemnly committed their city and the walls of it to the divine protection; or, **3.** Because the priests were the builders of it; and it becomes ministers above others, being themselves in a peculiar manner sanctified to God, to sanctify to him all their performances, and to do even their common actions *after a godly sort*.

II. That the undertakers were very many, who each took his share, some more and some less, in this work, according as their ability was. Note, What is to be done for the public good every one should assist in, and further, to the utmost of his place and power. United force will conquer that which no individual dares venture on. Many hands will make light work.

III. That many were active in this work who were not themselves inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore consulted purely the public welfare and not any private interest or advantage of their own. Here are the men of Jericho with the first (v. 2), the men of Gibeon and Mizpah (v. 7), and Zanoah, v. 13. Every Israelite should lend a hand towards the building up of Jerusalem.

IV. That several rulers, both of Jerusalem and of other cities, were active in this work, thinking themselves bound in honour to do the utmost that their wealth and power enabled them to do for the furtherance of this good work. But it is observable that they are called rulers of *part*, or the *half part*, of their respective cities. One was *ruler of the half part of Jerusalem* (v. 12), another of part of Beth-haccerem (v. 14), another of part of Mizpah (v. 15), another of *the half part of Beth-zur* (v. 16), one was ruler of *one half part*, and another of *the other half part, of Keilah*, v. 17, 18. Perhaps the Persian government would not entrust any one with a strong city, but appointed two to be a watch upon each other. Rome had two consuls.

V. Here is a just reproach fastened upon the nobles of Tekoa, that they *put not their necks to the work of their Lord* (v. 5), that is, they would not come under the yoke of an obligation to this service; as if the dignity and liberty of their peerage were their discharge from serving God and doing good, which are indeed the highest honour and the truest freedom. Let not nobles think any thing below them by which they may advance the interests of their country; for what else is their nobility good for but that it puts them in a higher and larger sphere of usefulness than that in which inferior persons move?

VI. Two persons joined in repairing *the old gate* (v. 6), and so were co-founders, and shared the honour of it between them. The good work which we cannot compass ourselves we must be thankful to those that will go partners with us in. Some think that this is called the *old gate* because it belonged to the ancient Salem, which was said to be first built by Melchizedek.

VII. Several good honest tradesmen, as well as priests and rulers, were active in this work — *goldsmiths, apothecaries, merchants*, v. 8, 32. They did not think their callings excused them, nor plead that they could not leave their shops to attend the public business, knowing that what they lost would certainly be made up to them by the blessing of God upon their callings.

VIII. Some ladies are spoken of as helping forward this work — *Shallum and his daughters* (v. 12), who, though not capable of personal service, yet having their portions in their own hands, or being rich widows, contributed

money for buying materials and paying workmen. St. Paul speaks of some good women that *laboured with him in the gospel*, ^{<STAB>}Philippians 4:3.

IX. Of some it is said that they repaired *over against their houses* (v. 10, 23, 28, 29), and of one (who, it is likely, was only a lodger) that he repaired *over against his chamber*, v. 30. When a general good work is to be done each should apply himself to that part of it that falls nearest to him and is within his reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one, we shall be all mended. If he that has but a chamber will repair before that, he does his part.

X. Of one it is said that he *earnestly* repaired that which fell to his share (v. 20) — he did it with an inflamed zeal; not that others were cold or indifferent, but he was the most vigorous of any of them and consequently made himself remarkable. It is good to be thus *zealously affected in a good thin*; and it is probable that this good man's zeal provoked very many to take the more pains and make the more haste.

XI. Of one of these builders it is observed that he was *the sixth son* of his father, v. 30. His five elder brethren, it seems, laid not their hand to this work, but he did. In doing that which is good we need not stay to see our elders go before us; if they decline it, it does not therefore follow that we must. Thus the younger brother, if he be the better man, and does God and his generation better service, is indeed the better gentleman; those are most honourable that are most useful.

XII. Some of those that had *first done helped their fellows*, and undertook another share where they saw there was most need. Meremoth repaired, v. 4. and again, v. 21. And the Tekoites, besides the piece they repaired (v. 5), undertook another piece (v. 27), which is the more remarkable because their nobles set them a bad example by withdrawing from the service, which, instead of serving them for an excuse to sit still, perhaps made them the more forward to do double work, that by their zeal they might either shame or atone for the covetousness and carelessness of their nobles.

Lastly, Here is no mention of any particular share that Nehemiah himself had in this work. A name-sake of his is mentioned, v. 16. But did he do nothing? Yes, though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet he did more than any of them, for he had the oversight of them all; half of

his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood sentinel, as we find afterwards (~~K0H6~~ Nehemiah 4:16), while he himself in his own person walked the rounds, directed and encouraged the builders, set his hand to the work where he saw occasion, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy, as we shall find in the next chapter. The pilot needs not haul at a rope: it is enough for him to steer.