

Return from Exile

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Call to Excellence

Part 6 – Teamwork. November 6, 2016

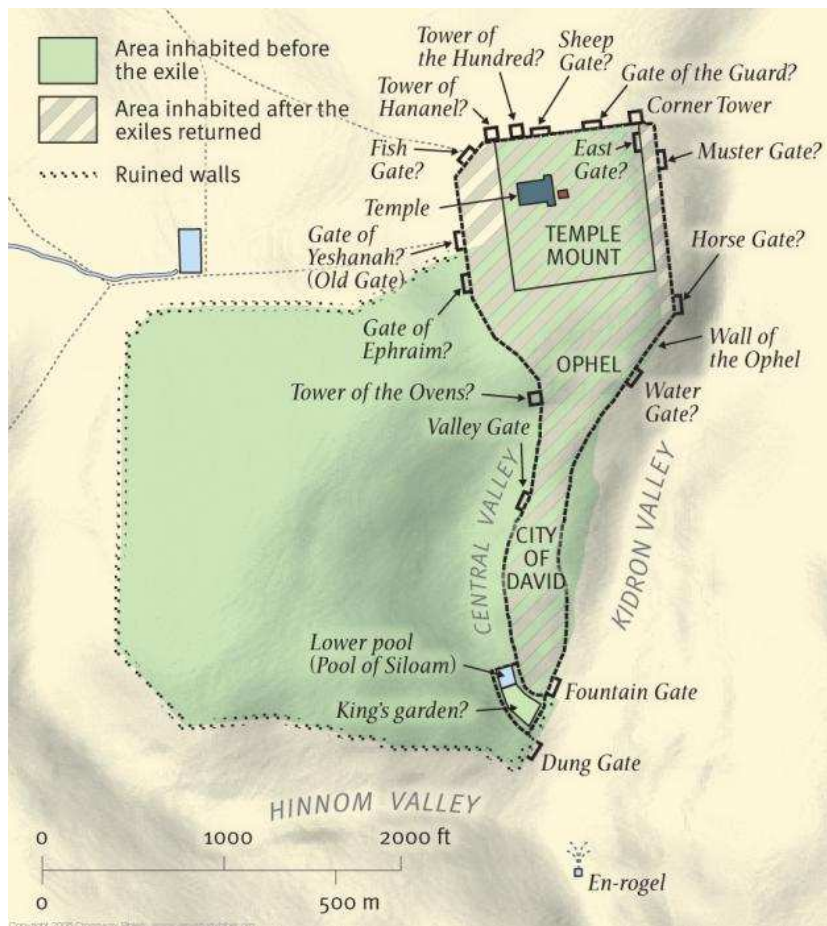
Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. ... So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. – Nehemiah @ 3-6. See also I Peter 2:4-9.

The Story

Nehemiah 3-6

- 538 B.C. Cyrus' decree for exiles to return to Jerusalem
- 516 B.C. Temple rebuilt
- 458 B.C. Ezra arrives and reinstitutes the Law
- 445 B.C. Nehemiah arrives and city wall is rebuilt

As you read, study and discuss chapters 3-6 refer regularly to this map and consider observations, insights and applications of the story and activities to the church and your life today!



Chapter 3 – Rebuilding the Wall: Locations and Participants

- *Note that the work begins @ the Sheep Gate with the high priest and his fellow priests consecrating it. This no doubt signifies the importance and sacredness of the effort to the rest of the Israelites.
- *The Tekoites repaired, their nobles did not (v5). The people even repaired another section of the wall near the Tower of Ophel. (v27). What can we learn from it?
- *Both perfumers (v.8) and goldsmiths (v.31) are mentioned. Do you think they were skilled in construction? One man included his daughters (can you find the verse?). What does this say to us?
- *My hero is Malchijah ... he built the dung gate (v.14). Who is a hero in the story to you?
- *Chapter 3 closes by circling back to the Sheep Gate (v.32) demonstrating completeness of project.

Chapter 4 – Opposition as Ridicule and First Response

- *The first form of opposition is ridicule. Sanballat and Tobiah were the chief opponents, but v. 7 also indicates Arabs and Ashdodites joined in. Significant because these 4 people/groups represent the peoples around the north, south, east and west of Jerusalem. They were surrounded by opposition!!
- *What types of responses do we see from Nehemiah and the leaders in Chapter 4?
- *What parallel might we find in the New Testament to opposition and our weapons of warfare? What opposition do we see today? What weapons should we use more effectively? See Ephesians 6:10-20.

Chapter 5 – Internal Conflict and a Generous Solution

- *What internal conflict arises here? Because the men were working on the wall it was greatly affecting their harvest. They were also forced to raise money by temporarily mortgaging their property putting them at great risk. They had to borrow to pay the heavy tax imposed by Persians on produce. The wealthy Jews themselves practiced debt-slavery and usury (very high interest). How do the people try and solve it? What if they had not brought it up in the first place, what would have happened? What if they had tried to resolve it destructively and apart from Jewish authority?



Chapter 6 – Opposition as Conspiracy and Work Finished

- *What kind of strategies do you see the opponents now using since the wall is built to half its height?
- *How does v.3 demonstrate Nehemiah's character and resolve?
- *How do you think the Israelites felt when they finished the wall? V. 15-16. Note: Think of the images of the Chicago Cubs players and fans after they won the World Series last week!!! What was the response of the people around them? What kind of influence did Israelites have as a result?

Excellence Overcomes EXTERNAL Opposition and INTERNAL Obstacles

I Corinthians 3:9-11. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled (wise) master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Reflect on the context and tone of Paul's description of his labor in the kingdom. What does it take to be a skilled master builder in God's kingdom?

It ATTRACTS and INFLUENCES Others

II Chronicles 9:3-4. When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. She arrived with a large group of attendants and a great caravan of camels loaded with spices, large quantities of gold, and precious jewels. When she met with Solomon, she talked with him about everything she had on her mind. ² Solomon had answers for all her questions; nothing was too hard for him to explain to her. ³ When the queen of Sheba realized how wise Solomon was, and when she saw the palace he had built, ⁴ she was overwhelmed. She was also amazed at the food on his tables, the organization of his officials and their splendid clothing, the cup-bearers and their robes, and the burnt offerings Solomon made at the Temple of the LORD.

Psalms 126. When the LORD brought back his exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream! We were filled with laughter, and we sang for joy. And the other nations said, "What amazing things the LORD has done for them." Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us! What joy!

In what ways can our 'excellence' influence others? In what ways does our 'lack of excellence' influence our culture and people around us? If we are a 'living Temple' (I Peter 2:4-9) how does this story apply to us today?!

Next Week: Nehemiah Chapters 7-8. Part 7 - Joy