

Unity and Continuity in Rebuilding

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[0 : 0 0] through the whole chapter verse 15 but it's pretty much the same all the way through to the end of the chapter where you have all of these names listed and where you have certain things that they did in repairing the wall of jerusalem now my house such a relevant book at all times i know the whole bible is relevant to us in different ways but i think especially in the situations we're facing now that nehemiah's book has so much to tell us and so much to encourage us by he faced huge challenges to the work that he was doing for the lord but overcame them by the blessing of the lord and he comes before us as a superb leader and every superb leader is a leader utterly dependent on god and that's certainly what nehemiah was and as he was led by god and as he led the people so we come to chapter three where the repairing of the wall is now taking place now the previous two chapters you find nehemiah himself referred to having come back from from where he was in exile along with others and he came back to uh to jerusalem god brought him back there and he set about first of all an assessment of the situation an inspection of the walls and then towards the end of chapter two you find him exhorting those that especially were leaders of the people and uh exhorting them to take up their own role and to help him uh to actually come to repair not just the walls of jerusalem but the whole cause of god in jerusalem that has so long been reflected due to their years in exile in babylon now the work can begin after the assessment inspection and exhortation are now over but why are we given such a chapter as this with a list of names which appears to be really not much more than just a list of names of course there are other chapters in the bible like that as well and when we're reading perhaps we're uh attending maybe or tempted uh just to skip over this chapter if you're reading through the bible in your daily readings for example and you'd come to nehemiah you might be tempted to say there's nothing really there but a list of names so i can easily skip over chapter three and move to chapter four and i really wouldn't have missed much out except all these difficult hebrew names so that would be a mistake of course because there is no section of the bible that is that isn't relevant in its own right there's no section of the bible no section of any chapter no chapter in itself every single chapter every passage every verse indeed in the bible is relevant and significant in its own right and placed exactly where god intended it to be placed so we mustn't be tempted to skip over these sort of passages but just go through them slowly and look out at what's there apart from the list of names and try and sift through the list of names as if you were sifting through grains or stones looking for little precious bits and then sifting them out and finding them as you take time going through them and that's what this chapter is really like and this chapter was written not just for the record or for the official records of nehemiah's day it has theological importance for the people of nehemiah's day and for those who came after and of course now for ourselves as well it's theologically important because this chapter especially we can say we can summarize it really tonight under two main points as to what it teaches it teaches us first of all about unity it teaches us secondly about continuity because these people are mentioned as united in this important work

of building the wall of jerusalem of repairing it against their enemies and that's what we are given the privilege of doing and being a united people against the attempts made by those who don't like the gospel to destroy the gospel to undermine our efforts to discourage us in the work and this chapter three of nehemiah will encourage us as we see how united they were and how that unity is described in this list of names throughout this chapter and then there's continuity as well because not only is this something that shows the unity of these people but it shows a continuity as well as we'll see towards the end of the study tonight how it's a continuity with what went before the exile 70 years or more before this and what also comes after as this leads us into the new testament and right up to our own present day as well so there's a continuity between the people before that exile and also after that exile and that's really brought together in the way they're listed here and spoken

of here in nehemiah 3 so let's look at this there's a unity first of all and the chapter begins significantly by talking about the leaders talking about eliasheb the high priest who rose up with his brothers the priests and they built the sheep gate and consecrated it and set up its doors and as we read through that part of the chapter so often it mentions the gates that they rebuilt the doors the bolts the bars in other words it's really telling us this this was not a quick fix it job this was something that was carefully done they took account of all the detail as they went about the repairs whatever it was needed to be repaired it didn't just repair it they repaired it soundly it was made to last was made with a view to providing for the covenant people from this day onwards these days onwards but you notice here they rose up these these leaders of of the people the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests and they built the sheep gate now that's a response to what you find in the previous chapter to the um the exhortations of nehemiah himself look at verse 20 there for example i replied to them uh this is when uh news was was given him of their enemies that were going to try and uh stop the work and undermine the work and actually discourage the people then i replied to him the god of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build but you have no portion or right or claim in jerusalem when we say that to their enemies the god of heaven will make us prosper we will rise and build then you read in chapter three they rose up together they responded uh to this exhortation to come and take the leadership of rebuilding the walls of jerusalem and show the people that they were there to lead the people into the work of rebuilding re-establishing things in jerusalem they were stirred up to do so by the words of nehemiah himself and especially by pointing them to god and to his promises and to the efficiency and sufficiency of god and that's really what church leaders are for church leaders are there not to give political pontifications that doesn't mean we never cry disc and we never um criticize or give critiques of those who are leaders in the political field we have to do that when they're contrary to the word of god we need to show that the leaders of the church need to show that they need to be to the to the forefront in doing that but your spiritual leaders tonight are there so that they will show you the example so that you will be able to follow them so that they will be prominent and in first place in rising up to actually build the walls of jerusalem spiritually of course i mean and so that's why you choose spiritual leaders elders ministers to be over you so that by god's blessing by god's leadership himself by god's power we will prove to be effective in being the leaders of the church and it's always a challenge to us and that's why we value your prayers so much it's always a challenge to us to be leaders in the church of god to be at the forefront the lord should never actually deflect us from from being that if that's what god has led us to be but it is a challenge and we need your prayers and we value your prayers and we thank you for your prayers that you have risen up and that you've taken this role that god has led you to uh for the way in which we need the church to be led by people who themselves are led by god so that's the first thing to notice the leaders led the way but they led the way and you notice the emphasis on the sheep gate and apparently the sheep gate as they consecrated it and set up its doors it was part of the entry way to the temple and that itself is making an important point that this repair work set god at the heart of it it had to do with building up the cause of god building up the people of god re-establishing the sacrifices in jerusalem that's really what the repairs were all about the physical repairs of the walls and of the altar and of the temple they were all for a certain end and that was to build up a community of believing people once again to re-establish a covenant people of god having come back from exile and so the leaders focused on the sheep gate they were more or less saying by that look we as your leaders want to give prominence to the temple we'd hear us leaders under god and so we want to show you that that's of primary concern the cause of god the worship of god that's what we're here to actually be leaders of and that's what is that's what it's like even to this day so the leaders led the way and then we find from then on that it speaks about the whole people being involved the priests and the people named here by families in other words you can say really that everybody contributed although we'll see there is an exception in a moment but everybody part of that exception contributed wholeheartedly and gladly to the work of building or rebuilding the walls look at verse 12 for example even to the point of this man who's mentioned here next to him shalom the son of halohesh ruler of half the district of jerusalem he repaired he contributed to their peers he and his daughters you'd imagine that daughters were going to be left out of this because a lot of it was pretty heavy work demanding work but no the others there's a reference there to his daughters we don't know how old they were whether they were really young or up in ages we don't know but they were there and that's a very important mention because they were not accepted just because they

were daughters or female or had other responsibilities the whole people including such as these daughters were actually involved and then you look at verse 8 for example next to them uziel the son of hariah goldsmiths repaired next to him hananiah one of the perfumers repaired now if you're going to start building a wall with heavy stones and repairing all the debris that's there from years and years of neglect you're maybe not going to expect those who are goldsmiths who have such fine hands and fingers you're not going to expect them along with perfumers those who are providing and making these precious perfumes you might think well surely they're going surely they're going to be accepted sure you don't expect somebody who's a goldsmith to start using a shovel or something else like that in order to actually contribute to the work not so they were there they weren't there actually uh making up rings or uh or other gold artifacts they were there to help with the physical work of clearing rubble building up the walls of jerusalem in their own section of it so everybody contributes it mentions even people from outside of jerusalem there verses 2 and 5 and 7 and 13 and so on mentions people from outside the town itself and the districts even people from jericho as mentioned they're the men of jericho and others all the way through the chapter you can pick up those details for yourselves and it's important as i said at the beginning just take your time through it no matter whether you pronounce the words right or not to yourself important thing is you pick out these little details these little clues as to why you have this chapter what it's about how it's how it is encouraging for ourselves and really when you think about it all the people contributing that way it reminds you of certain passages in the new testament as well i'm just going to mention one just now it's in paul's letter to the philippians and you remember in chapter one of philippians that paul has been appealing to those in philippine that he's writing to to be of one mind or to let their manner of life be worthy of the gospel of christ in verse 27 there of chapter one so that whether i come and see you or i'm absent i may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel and not frightened in anything by your opponents you could almost imagine that um well we don't know that this is the case but you could imagine maybe that here is paul just lifting something out of nehemiah and saying look this is this is what it was then this is what it must be like now and not only do they each have their own contribution but they need to do that in a united way so that the whole people as one are striving together as paul put it for the faith of the gospel it's the same in principle the same in practice for our own day as well and if ever there was a day that needs that we strive together that they work we work together for the faith of the gospel that everyone does their own portion it's surely today because so much of what you find in our land is not really conducive to the gospel or to the progress of the gospel it's designed against it and that's even within the church and within people you might expect to to actually stand up against laws and practices and procedures that the bible itself denounces but that's not always the case sadly and that's how it was for them they all came together everyone contributed to the work apart from the exceptional mention in a minute but i want to say something in relation to that just now don't be put off by any increase in regulations this is something we find currently that i'm just mentioning just now there's so many regulations now that are required in order to actually for very good reason whether it's for child protection or vulnerable adults or people who have vulnerabilities of different kind that we need certificates we need to go through certain training and i know that's very off-putting and that's something that people might just say well i really think i've i've done my bit so why should i really go through this i've got all these years behind me now young ones are coming up and surely they can take over please don't say that your experience as someone who is older in years and experience is so vital to the congregation here to the church to the cause i know it's a hassle having to go through training online but it only takes an hour and a half and it's not a difficult thing and you can get guidance from from ian or for whoever um to actually help you go through that or if it's applying for a pvg certificate for for work in this congregation it's important to have it because the more we say well i'll just leave it to others really i don't want to go through the hassle of all of that what are we doing with that what we're doing we're withdrawing ourselves from the rebuilding of the walls and you can imagine if you go through this chapter if some of these people had said well i've done my bit i've done all that i think is necessary others can now take over there's no evidence of that anywhere in these uh in these details so i'm saying that to encourage you i'm saying that to to actually um put it to myself and to yourselves because we all have to be like this uh committed to the work of the gospel whatever it takes whatever demands are made of us reasonably we should always say well it's a hassle it's difficult i'd rather it wasn't there but i want to be committed to the work of christ to the work of christ in this congregation or beyond so please

don't be deflected don't be put off because everyone here contributed in nehemiah's day to the rebuilding of the wall including even this man is mentioned interestingly in verse 11 malhaja the son of harim and hazub the son of pahath moab now it's an interesting reference there to malhaja because when you go to ezra the previous book which interlinks very much with nehemiah um you'll find in ezra chapter 10 and at verse 31 there's a reference there to malhaja it's obviously the same man it mentions his ancestry as well along with a list of others who had actually come to marry foreign women which was forbidden for those people of israel so he was actually dealt with them they had to uh put away these foreign wives uh they were called to task as it were for that but here he is you see he's still appearing in the work of building the walls of jerusalem in other words his past his past uh failure did not actually prevent being used of god in this new venture of rebuilding the walls of jerusalem we have to remember that ourselves that we all have faults we all have failures and when god comes to deal with our failures and when we're if we need to be rehabilitated and brought back into the fellowship of god's people it's so that we will contribute to the work and they will uh the work will actually also be given to us and wholeheartedly again we can be together in the work of the lord so everybody contributed including this malhaja nobody here said you don't need me nor did anybody here say you surely are not going to use them or him or her they're all wonderfully together as one people in the work of the lord except for those that are mentioned there in verse five and it really stands out and it jars on your mind as you read down through the chapter that there is this one exception that really spoils the total unity that would otherwise be

[20 : 11] there here is verse five notice what it says next to them the techoites repaired but their nobles would not stoop to serve their lord their nobles would not stoop to serve their lord and it's interesting the way it's put they refused to take part a small group um these important people in their own right at least these people who had some status they refused to help in the work and the way that nehemiah puts it is they would not stoop they would not lower themselves they would not bow themselves to serve as all the others serve and that's a reminder to us isn't it friends that spiritual building work requires humble service it requires us to deny ourselves it requires us to humble ourselves it requires us to follow the lord's example who never said i can't be expected to do that because he's brought before us in the word as the great leader and as the great leader of his people how does the bible describe him how does the how do the uh the new testament writings describe him well philippians 2 you remember very well he humbled himself having come into this world having taken our nature he humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross you remember he said to the disciples at one time did it seem to have been more than one occasion talking about the kings of the gentiles and what the kings of the gentiles expect of their subjects especially of their servants they expect that they will sit there and they will be served the kings just depend on others to serve them but i he said i'm among you as the servant the one who serves i am the complete opposite of the kings of the world i did not come into the world he said on another occasion to be served but to be a servant the son of man has come not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many and that's the principle you find outlined here by way of this exception by this by way of this glaring exception these nobles they would not stoop themselves to serve their lord you know stooping to serve the lord denying ourselves uh being required to do things which perhaps we ourselves find difficult or challenging to do that's a privilege when you think of what the lord did for us he stooped himself even to the extent of the death of the cross so there's the leaders leading the way there's the whole people but for this one exception and then it mentions as you read through it you can say that it involves the whole wall there's this unity the leaders leading the way the whole people with one exception and then you've got the whole wall mentioned very interestingly as what they actually set about repairing because when you begin and you go through these different gates that are mentioned in the chapter um they seem rather insignificant just a matter of fact sort of thing but when you go to verse 32 didn't read as far as that the last verse of the chapter and between the upper chamber of the corner and the sheep gate the goldsmith and the merchants repaired and there you see you're back at the beginning the sheep gate is the very first thing that's mentioned back at the beginning of the chapter that um elashib the high priest and his

brothers the priests they built the sheep gate so in other words nehemiah has taken us all the way around the sheep gate and he's described how these people side by side close together actually set about the work wholeheartedly and as he's taken us through all of these groups of these family

groups all the way around that you find the whole wall is actually included in that particular walk around the wall if you like that he's mentioned by mentioning these people and that too is important um for the work of the gospel because if we can spiritualize this for a moment legitimately i think we can we can do that of course because all of this has spiritual meaning for us they were physical walls but they had a very spiritual significance and so they do as well today as we're trying to set out but when you think about um the gospel work and the work of the gospel let's just confine it to our own congregation although we're united with others in the work of the gospel of course but if you think about the work of the gospel in the congregation as building up the walls of jerusalem building up the cause of god contributing our own part to doing that what do you find you find lord's day services you prime join weeknight services like this prayer meetings you find other meetings simply for prayer you find sunday school you find twinnies you find creche you find uh meetings for the youth you find youth fellowship you find um youth youth activities you find work for older folks to do and they are of course involved in work with the younger ones too you find an emphasis we hope on families and an involvement of families and it's thrilling to see families being part of the congregation as families together we have our over 55 club we have other activities along with all of these and the services there you see is as it were taking account of the whole wall that needs to be built and needs to be kept up needs to be repaired and kept in good order there isn't a section of that wall as i've described it that's unimportant all of these activities make up one wall that we need to keep in good shape that we need to actually maintain for the lord to which we need to contribute our own portion whatever it is doesn't matter if it's not as prominent as that given to others that's not the point you have something to do i have something to do we have to do it together and together it's a matter of the whole people covering the whole wall the whole work for the lord and each section of that wall in jerusalem that that literal wall of stone each section of that was important to its overall security to its overall strength if any one part of that wall was too weak obviously that would be an advantage to the enemy think of what we're doing in the congregation along those lines as well all of these sections of the wall young folks preschool primary school secondary school older ones all of these sections of the wall are so important they all contribute in their own way to the strength of god's cause here and we have to as much as we can give our own contribution to the maintenance of that wall so there is the unity that this wonderful chapter really sets out for us but i mentioned also that

there's continuity and just briefly um you can see verse seven chapter seven for example and from verse five onwards another list of names chapter seven there you have that other list of names they're set out in a slightly different way you have a similar thing in ezra chapter two and and you don't need to look this up just now but when you go back earlier to joshua and to numbers you find different uh lists but similar lists uh really at joshua 18 and 19 numbers chapter one and verse 26 and what are do what what is doing really is telling us that what's happening here in chapter three of nehemiah is connected to what happened before the people actually went into exile in babylon and now that they're back from exile in babylon all that is actually being reconnected if you like so put it this way god established his covenant community in the land of canaan as he promised he took his people out of egypt he established them in canaan he made them there into an organized people of god a covenant people and then came 70 years of exile and they took that upon themselves for their disobedience as god had warned and threatened 70 years have elapsed and more and now they're coming back to jerusalem not all at once but in different groups and being reunited under the leadership of nehemiah and ezra and the prophets that prophesied to them as well zechariah and haggai and as that's happening what you're finding is that the covenant promises and pledges of god that he gave to the people when he established them in canaan they didn't get lost in babylon god didn't throw them away god didn't say when they went into exile in babylon i'm finished with you as a people i'm finished with my covenant promises i no longer have have anything to do with you in a covenant sense the covenant that they broke and the the the punishment of god for the breaking of the covenant is the exile in babylon the covenant hasn't gone away and this is not a new covenant that's being established here with the people now they're back in jerusalem but it's a new beginning a new beginning for the same covenant people of god why is that important for ourselves because god only has one people throughout every age of history one people of god all the way through from these early old testament times into the days of the apostles down through the history of the church and of the world right up to stornoway 2023 you're united to the work that was going on in jerusalem in nehemiah chapter 3 and before that because god's covenant is god's covenant of salvation god's covenant of redemption god's covenant with his people in christ in other words god's

that is surely a huge encouragement to you and to me tonight here we are facing in this world so much that threatens us so much that threatens to overwhelm us who knows what yet may happen in terms of political movements and statutes on our national statute book that may themselves even more squeeze the gospel and the freedom to preach the gospel and to live out the gospel we hope it won't come to that but it may come to that and the signs are ominous and we need to keep checking to see what's happening and praying about what's happening but every attempt as you see from the book of nehemiah itself every attempt to destroy the church will ultimately fail now that's not in any way to make us slacken in our concentration or just step back in our efforts for christ and for his gospel but there's so much there to reassure us so much there to comfort us in times of great difficulty and great challenge the enemy will not destroy the church he may take away our freedoms he can't take away our salvation he may take away our opportunities for further outreach and evangelism he cannot take out of our hearts the jesus that has come to live there and that itself has been so precious to god's people down through the years and therefore tonight let's let's take great encouragement from this this chapter which has challenge in it certainly but also so much to encourage us and let's seek ourselves to be a united people a whole people where everyone contributes where everyone does something for the lord where there are no exceptions that say no i refuse to bow to lower myself and where the whole wall the whole work as far as possible is covered by what we set about to do for the lord unity and continuity and as paul finished his great treatise in one corinthians 15 that we're looking at on sunday evenings you remember how he finishes therefore be steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the lord for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the lord let's pray lord our god we thank you that your word brings us so much encouragement so much to strengthen us so much to teach us and to lead us in these great avenues of truth you are the god of history the god who brings us back to such basic powerful events as your own resurrection from the dead and we thank you lord for the conviction you have given us of the historicity of these great events of the exodus the settlement in canaan the return from captivity the re-establishment of your cause in jerusalem the growth of the new testament church reaching out with the gospel into the gentile world and the many ways lord down through the years of the history of the world and which you have blessed your people and made them a blessing to the world around them lord we pray that you would by your blessing maintain in us and increase in us that unity that would set about the work of the gospel wholeheartedly we thank you for all the support that we are able to give to each other and we thank you oh lord that you have proved yourself to be faithful at all times to the way in which you lead and guide your people and so we ask that you would bless us now continue to bless us throughout the rest of this week and as we look forward again to the lord's day lord help us to rejoice in that day and to rejoice in it as yet one great contribution that you have made to the life of your people here as we pray now for jesus sake amen let's sing a conclusion now this evening from psalm 48 48a and that's in the sing psalms on page 63 we're going to sing from verse 8 to the end of the psalm verse 14 please do have