

Backgrounds

“Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate ... Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, repaired ... Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters ... And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.”
Nehemiah 3:1, 8, 12, 32

After some of the inhabitants of Judah returned from exile in Babylon, they had to rebuild Jerusalem, including the temple, their homes, and, as we have here, the wall of Jerusalem and its gates. It was a monumental task, and it was given not only to those who were skilled in building and construction, but to all who had the physical ability to help, whether they were trained or not. In fact, it was understood that this was a God-given task and any who did not participate were not serving God.

All of Nehemiah 3 is a list of those who helped rebuild the wall and when we read this list we find that many tradespeople of occupations other than building helped rebuild. In this list there are such people as Eliashib the high priest, a man whose training was not in rebuilding city walls but in serving the spiritual needs of the people. There was Uzziel, one of many goldsmiths, who helped rebuild the wall. There were various political rulers and merchants, none of whom are recorded as having any background in masonry, carpentry, or construction, who took this task upon themselves and served the Lord whether they had official training or not.

This is a great lesson for us. We often assume that we shouldn't do something because we can't already do it well. The truth is that we don't need a Ph. D. in Theology in order to serve the Lord in our churches and in our communities any more than we first need a degree in Communication before we can sit and talk with those who are shut-in. On the contrary, the backgrounds we have will most likely make us unique in how we can help. It may be difficult at first, just as it was for goldsmiths or the daughters of a ruler of Jerusalem to learn to rebuild a wall, but our backgrounds are not an excuse for not working for the Lord. If anything, our backgrounds help us to serve in ways no one else is able to serve.

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