

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

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INTRODUCTION

The seventy years of Israel's captivity had now come to an end, exactly as Jeremiah said it would, **Jeremiah 29:1-14**, and so, the Book of Nehemiah covers the events of the Jews returning from their Babylonian captivity. In the year 538 B.C., the Medes and Persians took over from the Babylonians and became the ruling power of the world.

All the prisoners, including those from Israel, who were formally under the subjection of Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king were now under the control of Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king. Isaiah also prophesied the end of Israel's captivity, he even names Cyrus and tells us that he would be the king who would help Israel rebuild the temple and Jerusalem, **Isaiah 44:28-45:7**.

Cyrus was a different kind of king, as he believed that all his prisoners would be more loyal to him if they were free, rather than being slaves. He and the other kings who followed, helped the people to return home and rebuild their temples. Because the people were free to practice their religion, this, in turn, promoted loyalty to the kings.

The return of Judah took place in three stages and may be summarised as follows.

STAGE 1

This first stage was by the decree of Cyrus for the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple to God in 538 B.C. **Ezra 1-6**. Zerubbabel was the political leader of the Jews who returned at this time and Joshua was the Levitical religious leader who returned with him.

Approximately 50,000 people returned at this time. 42,360 Jews plus 8,000 servants. This included 200 singing men. The purpose of this return was to rebuild the temple, which was completed in 516 B.C. The work of rebuilding the temple began under Zerubbabel and Joshua. The altar was established on October 5th 537 B.C., and the foundations of this second temple were completed in May/June of 536 B.C.

However, the people grew selfish and careless and the work lay dormant for several years. God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to rebuke and encourage the people, and the temple was finally completed in February/March of 516 B.C.

STAGE 2

The religious leader of this return was Ezra the scribe in 457 B.C. **Ezra 7-10**. This was a much smaller return as only about 2,000 Jews returned at this time. The purpose of this return was to purify the worship services. Pagan wives had been taken and squatters were in the temple.

STAGE 3

It was at this time that Nehemiah was allowed to return to the land in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and enable the people to re-inhabit the city, 445/444 B.C. **Nehemiah 1:1-13**. The name Nehemiah means 'the Lord

comforts'. He was the son of Hacaliah and held the prominent position as a cupbearer to the king of the Medo-Persian Empire. He was later appointed by Artaxerxes I to be the governor of Judah.

When word came to Nehemiah about the state the Jews were in, he was deeply moved. The walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and the returning Jews were under a constant threat. He knew that something had to be done and as all good leaders should do, he took action and did something about the situation his fellow people were in.

He didn't have a meeting about the situation first and he didn't wait for someone else to step up to the mark. He stepped up to the mark believing that God was using him, and he allowed God to use him to help his people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

AUTHOR

Most of the book is written in the first person and since the book itself declares that Nehemiah is the author, we can safely come to the conclusion that Nehemiah wrote the book.

The name Nehemiah means 'the Lord comforts' and he was the son of Hacaliah of Judah. He held the important position of a cupbearer to the king of the Medo-Persian Empire. He was later appointed by Artaxerxes I to be the governor of Judah.

As a leader, Nehemiah told the people what they didn't want to know and he led them where there was great resistance in going. He was able to do this because of his passion for the law of God, and his desire to preserve the future of Israel according to the law. Other prophets around at this time were Ezra, Malachi, Haggai and Zephaniah.

DATE

It's generally accepted that Nehemiah wrote the book around 430 B.C. Ezra had been in Jerusalem for about 13 years when Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 444 B.C., so, Nehemiah covers the events between 444 B.C. and 432 B.C.

LIFE DURING THE RETURN

Very little had changed from the time of the exile. The Jews were living previously in Babylon, modern-day Iraq, during the exile. But we find them in the land of Persia, modern-day Iran, and returning to their homeland of Israel during the period of the return.

The land of Persia or modern-day Iran is a large plateau between the plain of the Tigris on the west and the Indus River valley to the east. In the south, it is bordered by the Persian Gulf leading to the Indian Ocean. To the north of the plateau are the Caspian Sea and the chains of mountains that extend from the south end of the Caspian Sea.

Cyrus conquered territories he emphasized winning the favour of the gods, the priesthoods and their followers in those lands. Thus he would reverse the deportation policies of Assyria and Babylon, allowing people to return to their homelands and thus gaining their loyalty.

The Persian people were polytheistic, but at this time there seems to have been the beginnings of Zoroastrianism. To be sure, Darius and Xerxes exalted Ahuramazda, the god Zoroaster preached, but they do not mention Zoroaster. Cyrus, however, comes across as very tolerant of various religions, making him simply a typical Persian polytheist.

Zoroastrianism contains a dualism, a contradiction of good and evil, a Good Spirit and an Evil Spirit with his demon henchmen. The Good Spirit represents light, fire, summer, fertile land, and health. While the Evil Spirit represents darkness, winter, drought, sickness, and death.

In later Zoroastrianism, individuals were judged by whether their good deeds, outweighed their evil deeds. Fire was used as a symbol of the god Ahuramazda, the god worshipped in Zoroastrianism.

All other aspects of life, dress, diet, etc, were the same as the period of the exile. Obviously, those who stayed in Persia lived a wealthier lifestyle than those who returned to the land. Those that returned would have a more basic lifestyle for a while until houses were rebuilt, city walls put up and crops re-grown.

OUTLINE

Nehemiah's Prayer for the Exiles.	Nehemiah 1
Artaxerxes Sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem.	Nehemiah 2
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Ezra Reads the Law.	Nehemiah 8
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Israelites Seal the Covenant.	Nehemiah 10
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NEHEMIAH 1

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

'The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." Nehemiah 1:1-3

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign, which was 457 B.C. **Ezra 7:8**. But Nehemiah arrived in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes I which was 444 B.C.

The citadel of Susa was the winter capital of the Medo-Persian Empire and it was the same place where Daniel saw the vision of the ram with two horns, **Daniel 8:2**.

Notice it was Nehemiah who asked Hanani about what was happening with those who survived the exile and Jerusalem. He wants to know how the people and the city were doing. Why does he want to know about what's happening 800 miles away?

Well, to a Jew, Jerusalem meant everything to them, it was the city of David, it was the place where God dwelt among His people, **Psalm 137:5-6**. It appears that even though Nehemiah is physically in Persia 800 miles away, his heart is in Jerusalem.

The news he received wasn't encouraging. At this point in history, the wall had never been rebuilt since Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it.

There had been an effort by the Jews to rebuild the wall, somewhat earlier in the reign of Artaxerxes I, but that had been totally frustrated by the hatred of Rehum and Shimshai the deputy rulers, **Ezra 4:17-22**. At this moment in time, things are not good for God's people.

Hanani informs Nehemiah about what was happening. A city without walls, a city without gates, is a city that's open to attack. It's totally defenceless which means they also have no protection. No city walls, no city gates, no wonder the people lived in great trouble and disgrace.

‘When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.’ Nehemiah 1:4

When Nehemiah heard what was happening to his people and Jerusalem, he was overwhelmed with sadness, he mourned, fasted, and prayed. He genuinely cared about what was happening. The news shocked him so much that he had to sit down and after he sat down, he began to weep and mourn.

And notice he mourned for many days, why was that? Fear, confusion, apprehension, realisation that the task ahead was beyond him and he was in absolute need of not just anyone's help, but God's help.

Most of us men would probably just get up and do something about the situation. We see a problem, we just go ahead and try and fix it so that we can go back to life as normal.

Why didn't he just get up and do something to help the situation in Jerusalem? Well, I believe that there was more important work which needed to be done first. Yes God was going to use Nehemiah to help with the situation in Jerusalem, but God needed to work on Nehemiah first. Hence why he also fasted and prayed for many days.

After being baptised by John, Jesus fasted for forty days and nights, before He began His public ministry, **Matthew 4:2**. The prophets and teachers in Antioch prayed and fasted before sending Paul and Barnabas out for their mission trip, **Acts 13:1-3**.

In other words, when God is about to do something great, He usually begins by working on that person He's going to use. He prepares them spiritually for what they are about to do.

And notice He fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Now remember there were many gods in Persia, but He deliberately prays to the only true God because knows that only God Himself can meet His needs.

Nehemiah genuinely cared about what was happening back in Jerusalem. He didn't declare a national time of mourning and fasting. His genuineness is seen in the fact that he wept, mourned, fasted and prayed alone when he heard the bad news.

Just as Nehemiah wept over the city of Jerusalem because it lay in ruins, many years later Jesus would weep over the city, **Luke 19:41**. Jesus wept over the city because He knew that it was going to be destroyed again by the Romans.

Just as Nehemiah wept over the city of Jerusalem because it lay in ruins, many years later Jesus would weep over sin, **John 11:35**. Jesus wept because He saw the full consequences of sin happening right in front of Him, in his friend Lazarus.

‘Then I said: “LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.’ **Nehemiah 1:5-7**

Earlier we saw that God was preparing Nehemiah for the task ahead, now Nehemiah has to prepare Himself too for the task ahead. Prayer is a vital part of being a Christian, however for leaders, if they have big plans for the church, they need to pray big and pray about everything, **Philippians 4:6**.

In fact, Nehemiah is recorded praying 14 times within this book. He prayed when he was mourning, and he’s praying here before to get himself ready for the task God has set out for him. When the king asked him what was troubling him, he prayed before answering him, **Nehemiah 2:4**.

In other words, prayer is needed before we start any project, prayer as needed whilst we go through that project and prayers of thanksgiving should be given after the project is accomplished. Some commentators believe that Nehemiah prayed for four months.

The work of rebuilding the walls only took 52 days to complete, but he spent a lot of time in prayer first, **Nehemiah 6:15**. However long he prayed for, we know that he took all of his anxieties to God in prayer and more importantly he left his anxieties with God, **1 Peter 5:7**. Nehemiah totally relied on God for strength, he didn’t rely on his own strength, **Isaiah 40:31**.

Nehemiah also knows exactly who he is praying to. He prays to the LORD God of heaven, he prays to the great and awesome God. He prays to the God who keeps His covenant of love for those who love Him and keep His commandments. He knows he needs God’s help and he totally relies on God, this is seen in his request for God to be attentive to prayer.

Look how humble he is in his prayer, he confesses the sins of Israel, his own sins, and also the sins of his father’s family. What I love about this is that he doesn’t try to excuse his own sins or anyone else’s sins.

Obviously, Nehemiah was a godly man, but he openly and passionately puts himself in his father’s house and prayed by using “we” instead of “they.”

Nehemiah now calls upon God to remember His promises to His people.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.’ **Nehemiah 1:8-10**

Nehemiah is basically saying, God, You made a promise to Moses and this nation, I ask you now to make good on it, **Deuteronomy 30:1-8**. Many of us promise many things to our children and all too often we fail to fulfil those promises. But Nehemiah knew that God never fails in His promises, He gives His children.

If they broke the covenant, God had said that they would be scattered among the nations. This had taken place in the history of Israel since the time before the Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. But God also promised that if they repented in the land of their captors, He would bring them back into their land of promise.

As we looked at in the beginning, an initial group of returnees had reaped the benefit of returning under the reign of Cyrus in 536 B.C. and a second group in 457 B.C. At this time Nehemiah sought to do the same.

From the time he heard the news of the conditions in Judah, to the time of his departure, three to four months had transpired. Just as God placed a time for Israel to spend in captivity, Nehemiah had to learn to work on God's timetable not his own.

Before Nehemiah could do anything for God, he first had to get himself right with God first, hence why he confesses his sins.

Leaders can't expect to do great things for God or lead a congregation to big adventures if they themselves have got sin in their lives. Leaders can't expect to do great things for God or lead a congregation in big adventures if they are aware of sin in the life of a congregation and don't deal with it.

When we prepare ourselves for worship, the person leading the opening prayer should always ask God to forgive the sins of the congregation before they begin to worship. A good leader must see the need for God in all their future plans, **James 4:13-14**.

A good leader should always rely on God's strength to do what is required and not rely on themselves, **Ephesians 6:10**. Nehemiah cared not only for his own spiritual welfare but also cared for the spiritual welfare of his people. He genuinely cared for the welfare of others.

‘Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man.’ I was cupbearer to the king.’ Nehemiah 1:11

Now that God has prepared Nehemiah for the task ahead and Nehemiah has prepared himself for the task ahead, He's now ready for the task ahead. Nehemiah concluded by asking God to bless him when he would soon speak to the king of Persia about the matter.

Nehemiah was going to do something about the sorry state of Jerusalem's walls and people, and he knows without God's intervention, he could do nothing.

Now make no mistake about it, he knows he needs God's help because this wasn't a straightforward task. In effect, Nehemiah was putting his life on the line to help his people, **Ezra 4:17-22**.

Nehemiah put his life on the line for his people, because his master Artaxerxes I had already accepted the charge of the Samaritans that Jerusalem was a bad and rebellious city. And any request of Nehemiah of Artaxerxes would involve asking him to cancel a decree that he himself had made only a few years previously.

Nehemiah introduced himself as one who was in a prominent position in the king's court in Persia. As a cupbearer to the king, it was his responsibility to drink some of the king's wine before the king partook in order to see if it was poisoned, **Nehemiah 2:1**.

Notice he doesn't pray, 'God please step in and just help my people'. He doesn't pray, 'God send someone else to deal with what's happening in Jerusalem'. He prays, 'God, use me, send me to help your people'. He said, 'Lord, if you want to use me, I am making myself available to You'.

Nehemiah was a great leader because he feared God, **Nehemiah 5:15**.

NEHEMIAH 2

INTRODUCTION

‘In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.” I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.’ Nehemiah 2:1-8

ARTAXERXES SENDS NEHEMIAH TO JERUSALEM

Approximately four months have passed since Nehemiah received the news about the Jews. Nisan was the first month of the Jewish year, the Aramaic name is Abib, which is around March or April.

Whenever someone went before the king, they were always to show a spirit of cheer and joy, but here, Nehemiah couldn't before the king in his usual manner because of the lengthy mourning, fasting and praying he had been experiencing for Jerusalem, [Nehemiah 1:4](#).

As a cupbearer to the king, it was his responsibility to drink some of the king's wine before the king partook in order to see if it was poisoned.

Many commentators suggest that the king had several cupbearers, who all took it in turn to serve the king. He goes before the king to serve him his wine as had probably done many times in the past, but this time he had a sad expression on his face.

Obviously, this wasn't the first time Nehemiah went before the king to serve him his wine, probably with a smile on his face, but this time the king notices that Nehemiah is looking sad and so, he asks him what was happening.

When the king asked him this, Nehemiah became fearful because a servant wasn't supposed to show sadness before the king and he knew it could cost him his life.

Overcoming his fear, Nehemiah tells him what the problem was but first, he tells the king how much he respects him by saying, 'may the king live forever'.

Then he goes on to tell the king how his ancestor's city was in ruins. We can only imagine what was going through Nehemiah's mind as he awaits an answer from the king.

Artaxerxes now asks Nehemiah what his request was and the response must have been one of rejoicing because God had answered his prayers, [Nehemiah 1:11](#).

Nehemiah prays to God again, possibly thanking Him or asking for courage to continue. After his prayer, he continues to show respect for the king as he makes his request known. He wants to go to Judah to help get his ancestor's city rebuilt.

Just as the Lord moved the spirit of Cyrus to allow the first exiles to return, [Ezra 1:1](#), it's possible that the Lord did the same to the king's spirit as the king grants his request and he becomes the new governor of Judah.

Notice the king wants to know how long he would be gone and Nehemiah gave him a time. Although weren't not told what that time was, we do know that it takes 3 to 4 months just to travel to Jerusalem one way and then he had to have time to help rebuild.

The set time he had given the king most probably changed because Nehemiah's first term in Judah was 12 years, [Nehemiah 5:14](#), after which he returned to Artaxerxes, and then went back to Judah, [Nehemiah 13:6-7](#). Nehemiah also asks for a letter to pass through the land safely to Judah and for a letter to Asaph for building supplies for the city. These governors were governors appointed by the Persians who served in the western territories of the Empire.

On his way to Judah, Nehemiah would have passed through the border controls of several governours of the Persian Empire, hence why he asks for letters of authority that would allow him to pass unhindered and unquestioned.

The permission to rebuild the walls that were given to Nehemiah was a reversal of the Persian king's decree that was made during the time of Ezra, [Ezra 4:21](#).

In the former decree to stop the building of the walls, Artaxerxes had stated that the building should be stopped until another decree was made by him. Nehemiah's authorization, therefore, was the other decree, which decree gave Nehemiah authority to build the walls.

Notice that Nehemiah gives all the credit to God, he is well aware that God is working in and through him.

'So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.' [Nehemiah 2:9-10](#)

It appears that Sanballat and Tobiah aren't impressed with Nehemiah because he has a full military escort. Ezra had previously refused government protection on his journey several years before, [Ezra 8:22](#), but here Nehemiah had special letters of authority from the government of Persia, [Nehemiah 2:7-9](#).

Sanballat and Tobiah weren't happy about this, and they were disturbed because they both opposed the Jews and didn't want them to be successful. The problem for them was the king is on the side of the Jews and this would bring to an end, their ability to keep the Jews from rebuilding their city.

Sanballat was the governor of Samaria at the time Nehemiah was in Judah. The Tobiah family was a very influential family in the Palestinian area during the time of Nehemiah, and up to the 2nd century, they retained their influence throughout the region.

Tobiah is evidently a wealthy landowner and lord of the time, and because of this, he had great influence throughout the region.

The third individual that opposed Nehemiah's work was Geshem, a prominent Arab leader, [Nehemiah 2:19](#) / [Nehemiah 6:1-2](#) / [Nehemiah 6:6](#). Geshem was also a very influential person in the region, and so, he put his influence behind Sanballat and Tobiah to bring to an end anything that the Jews attempted.

NEHEMIAH INSPECTS JERUSALEM'S WALLS

'I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was

riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.' Nehemiah 2:11-16

Notice how Nehemiah anticipated the resistance he would have received from Jews at Jerusalem, so he didn't tell any of them what God had planned to do through him. He wants to keep his initial plans a secret until he had made a plan for rebuilding.

He then goes out by night and begins to survey the city with a few men. He wants to see what had to be done and the best way to accomplish the task. At one point he had to get off his animal and walk because part of what he surveyed had to be done on foot.

Notice the officials didn't know where he had gone and what he had done. Although Nehemiah was working under the authority of the Persian king, the local rulers of the Empire were working against him.

'Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." Nehemiah 2:17-20

Nehemiah goes head and tells the Jews, the priests, nobles and officials of his plan. He begins by pointing out all the distress they are facing from the opponents, like the Samaritans. Because since they hadn't been able to rebuild the city, it became a daily reminder of their oppression.

Nehemiah calls for them to end this oppression and show their enemies that they can rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and restore the burned down gates. Nehemiah knows if the Jews could finish the city, it would change their outlook on life.

Notice how he gives God the credit again by informing them that it was God who had made this moment possible. Think about this for a moment, Nehemiah has never seen a miracle, he never received any visions and he never had a visit from an angel, however, he had great faith, [Romans 8:28-37](#).

Nehemiah tells the people about the support they have from the king and so, all these people needed to be refocused on rebuilding the city, they need a strong and encouraging leader like Nehemiah.

Imagine how the Jews must have felt at this point, for all of a sudden there is hope, and they shout out, 'let us start rebuilding', [Matthew 10:28](#) / [Romans 8:31](#).

The people rise up at the encouragement of Nehemiah and begin to build because they desperately wanted to work for God. The opposition to the work of God first came by mocking, that is, they are trying to embarrass those who are working.

The workers answered the mockers by saying, 'the God of heaven will give us success'. Nehemiah's confidence to do the work of God resulted from his knowledge of the will of God for Israel.

Notice he tells the mockers, who were Gentiles that they have no share or claim or historic right to the city. Nehemiah focused on preserving the heritage of Israel for the coming of the Messiah, [Ezra 4:2](#).

NEHEMIAH 3

INTRODUCTION

‘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 Zakkur 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 with their 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, Jedaiah 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 and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate. The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Rekab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun son of Kol-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 fellow Levites 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 armoury as far as the angle of the wall. 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 him 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, Pedaiah 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 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 Shekemiah, 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.’ Nehemiah 3:1-32

BUILDERS OF THE WALL

In this chapter, Nehemiah lays out his plans for the rebuilding of the walls, gates and towers of Jerusalem. You will notice that all the men and even some women are to take part in the building on the wall. The wall they were building was around a 50 acre plot of land.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The exact line which the writer follows in describing the circuit of the wall will probably be always a matter of dispute. According to the view here taken, the line described commences near the pool of Bethesda, on the east of the city, and is traced thence, first, northward, then westward, then southward, and finally eastward, as far as the pool of Siloam, [Nehemiah 3:15](#). From this point, it seems to the writer of this note that the line of the outer wall is not followed, but, instead of this, the inner wall of the ‘city of David,’ which included the temple, is traced. This wall is followed northward from the pool of Siloam, past the ‘sepulchres of David’ and Hezekiah’s pool to the ‘armoury’, [Nehemiah 3:19](#), at its northwest corner, it is then followed eastward to ‘the tower which lieth out from the king’s house’, [Nehemiah 3:25](#). From this, it is carried southward, along the western edge of the Kidron valley to the ‘great tower which lieth out,’ [Nehemiah 3:27](#), and then south-westward to the point at which it commenced near Siloam [Nehemiah 3:27](#). The special wall of the ‘city of David’ being thus completed, the writer finishes his entire account by filling up the small interval between the northeast angle of this fortification and the ‘sheep-gate’, [Nehemiah 3:28-32](#), from which he started.’

This whole building project wasn’t randomly put together by Nehemiah, everyone had a specific section of the wall they were to repair and they all worked on the same project, but in their designated areas of work.

In their assigned locations, they were, to begin with, that section of the wall that was nearest their house, [Nehemiah 3:10](#) / [Nehemiah 3:23](#) / [Nehemiah 3:28-30](#).

Their incentive for repairing the wall began with each family seeing their responsibility to secure their own houses by building that portion of the wall that was nearest their home.

You’ll notice that the chapter begins with the High priest and his fellow priests repairing the sheep gate and the wall to the left of it. It was only fitting that they the priest would work on the sheep gate since it was used to bring in the sacrificial lambs and it was the only gate that was sanctified by the priest.

Jerusalem was divided into different areas over which specific rulers were assigned authority, [Nehemiah 3:9](#) / [Nehemiah 3:12](#) / [Nehemiah 3:15-18](#).

Matthew Henry, in his commentary, says the following.

‘They repaired, from the sheep-gate to the fish-gate, [Nehemiah 3:1-2](#). Thence to the old-gate, [Nehemiah 3:3-5](#). Thence to the valley-gate, [Nehemiah 3:6-12](#). Thence to the dung-gate, [Nehemiah 3:13-14](#). Thence to the gate of the fountain, [Nehemiah 3:15](#). Thence to the water-gate, [Nehemiah 3:16-26](#). Thence by the horse-gate to the sheep-gate again, where they began, [Nehemiah 3:27-32](#), and so they brought their work quite round the city.’

There are 10 gates mentioned in this chapter and the gates were used for different purposes and symbolized different things. Gates were places for great assemblies of the people and as clearinghouses for news and announcements, [Proverbs 1:20-21](#).

Sometimes sacrifices were offered in gates, [2 Kings 23:8](#) / [Acts 14:13](#). Criminals were to be punished outside the gates, [Acts 7:58](#) / [Hebrews 13:12](#), gates stood as symbols of righteousness, [Psalm 118:19](#), and they also stood as a symbol of sin, corruption, and death, [Psalm 9:13](#) / [Matthew 16:18](#).

The Fish Gate is repaired and many believe that the Fish Gate got its name because the fish sellers of Tyre from the Mediterranean and Jordan and Sea of Galilee did their trade there, [Nehemiah 13:16](#).

Notice that although ‘the next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, their nobles wouldn’t put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors’.

The reason these nobles weren't pulling their weight and doing a fair share of the work was because they were loyal to Tobiah, who was the enemy of Nehemiah, [Nehemiah 6:17](#).

Notice also that the 'goldsmiths' and 'perfume-makers', that is, the business people were also building on the wall. We also see Shallum, with the help of his daughters working on the wall together.

The chapter continues listing those who are repairing the gates and the walls all back around to the other side of the sheep gate.

The text doesn't say that Nehemiah got involved with the physical work but knowing his character he probably did. The text does say that he managed it and oversaw its construction. There is a Nehemiah mentioned but he was the son of Azbuk, [Nehemiah 3:16](#).

According to some commentators, there would have been around 25 to 30 thousand Jews all working together to build the wall and this doesn't include those men who came and helped them in different areas.

There are 43 three different groups are named in the chapter and so it's not surprising that they were able to rebuild the wall in 52 days, [Nehemiah 6:15](#).

NEHEMIAH 4

INTRODUCTION

'When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?" Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!" Nehemiah 4:1-3

OPPOSITION TO THE REBUILDING

When news got back to Sanballat about the rebuilding work, he became really angry and incensed, he then went on to mock the Jews in an attempt to intimidate them once again, [Nehemiah 2:9-10](#) / [Nehemiah 2:19](#).

It appears that he tried to make his associates and the Samaritan army feel more powerful than the Jews, by making the Jews' progress seem insignificant. Tobiah did the same by claiming that if a small fox goes and touches the wall that it will fall over, [Lamentations 5:18](#).

Even though Sanballat was talking a big talk, he knew deep down that the Jews weren't as weak as he making them out to be. The reason for him getting angry was probably because he saw the efforts of the Jews as an attack against his authority, [Nehemiah 2:7](#).

'Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.' Nehemiah 4:4-5

While all the intimidation was going on, it would have been so easy for the Jews just to give up, but they didn't, they prayed to God. They asked God to protect them from their enemy and Nehemiah calls on God to bring down judgment immediately on those who mocked and discouraged the work, [Psalm 58:6](#) / [Psalm 69:25](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Nehemiah’s short prayer here is parenthetical, and such prayers form one of the most striking characteristics of Nehemiah’s history. This is the first one, and others are in [Nehemiah 5:19](#) / [Nehemiah 6:9](#) / [Nehemiah 6:14](#) / [Nehemiah 13:14](#) / [Nehemiah 13:22](#) / [Nehemiah 13:29](#) / [Nehemiah 13:31](#).’

‘So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.’ Nehemiah 4:6-9

Notice that they kept on working and at this point in time, they managed to build their walls up to half their height because the people had a mind to work for God and get the job done, [Luke 9:62](#).

It’s clear that the Jews’ enemies were getting angrier and angrier because they see God’s people being successful. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod, didn’t want them to succeed and they knew they had to act fast if they were going to have a chance at stopping the Jews.

Their plan was to cause as much confusion as possible, and they believed by doing this, the work would stop. However, the Jews were relying on God and they prayed to Him for help and strength and so, they began to watch and they were ready to fight.

They didn’t expect God to do everything for them, but they did want His help. Here we get another glimpse of Nehemiah’s leadership skills, he knows how to organise people for work, and he knows how to suffer under the threat of opposition.

‘Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.” Also our enemies said, “Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.” Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.” Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”’
Nehemiah 4:10-14

In these verses, we see that Sanballat was beginning to have a real negative impact on the Jews.

They’ve been working so hard on the wall and the gates, they were starting to get burned out and because they were so tired, they were starting to believe that the enemies were going to attack them at any moment. Even their Jewish neighbours were coming to them asking their fellow Jews to leave their work and come back to their homes.

Notice, however, what Nehemiah did to build the Jews’ faith up.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

1. He prayed to God, [Nehemiah 4:9](#).
2. He set a watch day and night, [Nehemiah 4:9](#).
3. He set armed men at ‘the lowest parts,’ i.e., places where the walls might be most easily attacked, [Nehemiah 4:13](#).
4. He brought in the Jews with their families from the outlying areas, armed them and kept them overnight in the city.
5. He stationed armed men throughout the city near the construction workers.

6. He kept a close eye himself upon the situation.

7. He kept a trumpeter by his side so that in case of an attack, he could promptly order all hands to repel it, [Nehemiah 4:18](#).

8. He called the whole assembly together, saying, ‘Be not afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and terrible’, [Nehemiah 4:14](#).

9. He commanded the people to be ready to fight, [Nehemiah 4:14](#).

10. And he ordered the work to go on full speed ahead! What a leader he proved to be!

This again demonstrates the leadership skill of Nehemiah, he saw a problem and addressed the problem in order for the people to continue working on the wall.

Nehemiah knew that God was with him, [Nehemiah 2:18](#), but he still did everything which needed to be done to build up the faith of his people.

It’s clear that some of the Jews were afraid, hence why he encourages them not to be afraid. They are encouraged to remember the Lord who is great and awesome, in other words, they were to trust in God and when they fought God would fight for them and protect them from the enemy, [Psalm 118:6](#).

‘When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day.” Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.’ [Nehemiah 4:15-23](#)

Now that the Jews were organised and ready to fight and defend themselves, Sanballat now decides to change his mind about his initial attack.

It takes a good leader to get people to work but it takes a great leader to those same people to work and defend themselves at the same time. These Jews were committed to finishing the work of God.

Nehemiah’s defensive strategy basically involved each family protecting one another. The work was to continue, but the workers were to arm themselves. Nehemiah didn’t want their enemies to think that they were unprepared to defend themselves, hence why they have swords, bows and spears.

Nehemiah orders the Jews of the surrounding regions to come to Jerusalem in order to defend the workers and the work was so severe that the workers laboured and slept in their clothes. This implies that they were continually on standby, either to work or defend.

NEHEMIAH 5

INTRODUCTION

‘Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.” Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.” Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.” Nehemiah 5:1-5

NEHEMIAH HELPS THE POOR

The events in this chapter describe didn’t just happen within the 52 days it took to rebuild the wall. In this chapter, we find that Nehemiah has now got some serious problems which needed to be dealt with.

It appears that the wealthy Jews were taking advantage of other Jews due to a famine which was taking place. The famine had caused some Jews to fall into debt because they couldn’t pay their taxes, [Ezra 4:13](#) / [Esther 10:1](#).

Some Jews have given themselves over to other Jews as servants because they had borrowed from them in order to pay their taxes. However, in their greed, the wealthier Jews were using this distressful time as a means to deprive their fellow Jews.

Their three complaints were as follows.

1. Because there were so many Jews in one area and there was a famine going on, this first group wants to be allowed to get some grain.
2. Some had to sell their homes and vineyards so they could have enough money to buy some grain.
3. Some had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax and they weren’t able to pay back what they borrowed and so, they were being forced into offering up their sons and daughters as slaves.

This is another deeply challenging time and problem for Nehemiah to sort out, but as we’re about to read, he is more than capable of doing so.

‘When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.” “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.” Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD.

And the people did as they had promised.’ Nehemiah 5:6-13

It’s worth pointing out that Nehemiah didn’t just jump in to try and solve the problem, he took his time and gave the matter some serious thought first. In his discretion, he knew that a stern rebuke was needed in order to correct the injustice.

The nobles and officials were taking advantage of the poor and they knew the Jews wouldn’t be able to pay back what they owed. In other words, the wealthy were getting wealthier at the expense of the poor.

The wealthy would have owned their own vineyards and land and they could have used their children as slaves. It was against the Law of God for an Israelite to sell even a servant as a bondman, much less a brother, Leviticus 25:42. Being a person who was leading the people in difficult times, the natural reaction of Nehemiah against such greed would be anger. Nehemiah puts a stop to this extortion, which was the collection of unlawful interest, and this practice was against the Law of Moses, Exodus 22:25 / Deuteronomy 23:19-20. It was lawful to charge interest to a Gentile, but not to a fellow Jew.

He reminds the nobles and wealthier Jews that he hadn't demanded payment from them as the official governor of the land. He had a right to require taxes from them as a representative of the king of Persia, but he didn't demand their money.

Notice that Nehemiah didn't give them a time for cancelling the debts, he demands that all such debts be cancelled straight away. They weren't only to restore their lands and houses, but also the one percent monthly interest that they had charged, Exodus 22:25 / Leviticus 25:36.

There was no arguing over this matter because although Nehemiah had the right as the governor of Judah to take payment, he didn't do so. The nobles and officials repented and made an oath that they would give back the interest they charged and give back the property they had taken.

Nehemiah shook out the folds of his garments which a symbolic gesture to demonstrate disgust and rejection, 1 Kings 22:11 / Jeremiah 27:2 / Jeremiah 28:10 / Matthew 10:14 / Acts 13:51 / Acts 18:6. It was after this gesture that the whole assembly said 'amen', and they praised God as the nobles and officials kept their promise.

'Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. Remember me with favour, my God, for all I have done for these people.' Nehemiah 5:14-19

The text tells us that Nehemiah was governor for 12 years, which was approximately 444-432 B.C. Being the governor allowed him to have certain provisions and the governors before him had taken their provisions, but Nehemiah didn't.

The reason for him not taking any provisions was because he didn't want to put a burden on the people, so he lived by his own means and took care of his servants, Acts 20:33-35 / 1 Corinthians 9:1-15.

The text also tells us that Nehemiah devoted himself to working on the wall, this could mean that he literally worked on the wall, or he continued overseeing the work of the wall.

Nehemiah finishes by asking God to remember him with favour, especially in light of everything he's done for the people.

Once again, the leadership skills of Nehemiah are seen here, as he quickly dealt with what could have easily become a time of tremendous disunity among the people.

NEHEMIAH 6

INTRODUCTION

‘When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates—Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Nehemiah 6:1-3

FURTHER OPPOSITION TO THE REBUILDING

In this chapter, we find that because all previous efforts of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem failed to stop the work on the wall by the Jews, Nehemiah 2:19 / Nehemiah 4:6-9, they come up with yet another plan to stop the work. The new plan was to be friends and they want to meet at a neutral place and talk things over. However, what they are really trying to do is get Nehemiah by himself, so they could possibly kidnap him or kill him, Titus 3:9-11. The place they wanted to meet was around 20 miles away and it was about 5 miles from Joppa. They send four different invitations to him, but Nehemiah’s answer didn’t change, 1 Samuel 16:7. His enemies knew that Nehemiah played a critical role in the Jews’ efforts to rebuild, and if they could get rid of him, it could have put an end to their renewed faith or at least slow them down. Even if their enemies just wanted to talk about the situation, Nehemiah wasn’t interested in compromising the work that God put into his heart to do, so he refused to negotiate, Leviticus 10:1-2 / 2 Samuel 6:6-7. Nehemiah had work to do and he wasn’t going to allow himself to get side-tracked by these evil men.

‘Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written: “It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.” I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.” Nehemiah 6:4-9

After failing four times to set up a meeting with Nehemiah, Sanballat tries yet another approach. He sends a fifth letter which was unsealed and in it, he makes false accusations in the hope that it will cause Nehemiah to come to meet with him.

The letter was to be written in order to intimidate Nehemiah and because it was unsealed, this would allow the messenger to read the letter and they would have the option of telling everyone he met what it said. The idea is that Sanballat wanted the Jews to believe that the rumours were true.

Sanballat is basically accusing Nehemiah of having some kind of a hidden agenda to become king and that he’s using the prophets to help him influence the Jews.

Notice, in order to create some fear among the people, he even said he’s going to send the message to the king too. In other words, he’s trying to destroy Nehemiah’s reputation, 3 John 9-10.

Nehemiah knew that he had the support of the king of Persia, and so, Sanballat’s letter to the king would come to nothing. Nehemiah personally knew the king, for he was the king’s cupbearer, and the king knew him, Nehemiah 2:1-3 / 2 Timothy 1:12 / 2 Timothy 2:19.

The good news is that Nehemiah didn't allow these false accusations to slow him down and so, he denies them and accused them of making these accusations up in their hearts. In other words, he's calling them liars.

He then prays to God to strengthen his hands to continue the work he's doing.

'One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. 'Nehemiah 6:10-14

In these verses, we discover that Shemaiah was an informer and he was hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to prophesy to Nehemiah. He wants Nehemiah to meet him in the temple where only the priest was allowed to go.

It's possible that Shemaiah wanted Nehemiah to go into the inner part of the temple where only the priests were allowed to go, Numbers 18:7. If Nehemiah went into this part of the temple, then they would be able to accuse him of entering a place he wasn't permitted to enter, 2 Chronicles 26:16-23.

It was because of this invitation that Nehemiah knew that this was a false prophecy because he knew it would violate God's Law because he wasn't a priest. Even if there was going to be an attempt on his life, he was not going to compromise God's Law and hide in the temple.

Nehemiah had no intentions to run away to save his life, especially when his fellow Jews were putting their lives on the line to rebuild the wall. In other words, his enemies were hoping they could force him into sinning so they could have some leverage to use against the Jews.

It appears that there was more than one prophet involved in trying to strike fear in Nehemiah and cause him to sin, but he didn't surrender to their words, and once again, he prays to God and asked Him to remember these evil deeds of Tobiah, Sanballat, the prophetesses Noadiah and prophets that were involved with this.

Once again we see the great leadership skill of Nehemiah in these verses, he was a leader who was willing and able to stand alone against the majority.

OPPOSITION TO THE COMPLETED WALL

'So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekariah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.' Nehemiah 6:15-19

Despite all the opposition from their enemies, Nehemiah and those faithful Jews who were working alongside him managed to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days.

Nehemiah prayed for four months, Nehemiah 1:1, but the work itself took less than two months. In other words, he worked longer in prayer than they needed to work to do the job.

When their enemies saw the completed work, they become fearful and lost their self-confidence because they could see that all their efforts had failed.

They come to the conclusion that the only reason this was possible was that the work was done by God. The Jews were there to stay, and the completion of the walls of Jerusalem was a statement to all the nations that they were there to stay.

We read in these verses the reason why some of these priests were against Nehemiah. They had allowed their daughters to marry Tobiah and his son Jehohanan and so because of this, they were willing to report all the good things about Tobiah and stand against Nehemiah.

It appears that these priests' personal connection with the enemy, had clouded their judgment and caused them to compromise God's truth and side with the enemy. It was Tobiah who opposed the rebuilding work with Sanballat and he was the one who was greatly disturbed that Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls, [Nehemiah 2:10](#).

He was the one who mocked Nehemiah's work, [Nehemiah 2:19](#) / [Nehemiah 4:3](#), and he was the one who became angry because of the work, which was being done, [Nehemiah 4:7](#). He was also one of the men who tried to get Nehemiah to stop the work and come to for a meeting to kill him, [Nehemiah 6:1](#).

Later, Tobiah, in the absence of Nehemiah, was allowed to take up residence in the temple area, [Nehemiah 13:4-7](#).

NEHEMIAH 7

INTRODUCTION

'After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do. I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses." Nehemiah 7:1-3

Now that the wall had been completed, [Nehemiah 6:15](#), Nehemiah wants the gates to be protected by men that he could trust and so, he chooses gatekeepers, singers and Levites to do so, [1 Chronicles 26:1-19](#).

He also put his brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, he is the same man that brought him the news about the Jews' condition when he still serving as cupbearer for the king, [Nehemiah 1:1-3](#). Nehemiah also put Hananiah in charge of Jerusalem, he is described as a man of integrity and God-fearing, [1 Timothy 1:12](#).

Normally the gates would be open from sunrise to sunset, but Nehemiah only wants them open for part of the day and he wants the people to keep an eye out at the gate and from their homes so that none of their enemies could pull a surprise attack on them.

This is why the gates were closed at night, and not opened until everyone was up and alert in the morning.

'Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there: These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town.' Nehemiah 7:4-6

From the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. to the time of Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem had been depopulated. The number of those who returned with Zerubbabel was no more than 42,360, [Nehemiah 7:66](#) and less than 2,000 people had come with Ezra, [Ezra 8:1-20](#).

When it says that the houses weren't rebuilt, it's clear from the text that this didn't mean all of them, because they did have some houses.

Notice how Nehemiah gives God all the credit again, this was all God's plan. Nehemiah finds a list of men that came back with Zerubbabel, which is the same list found in [Ezra 2:1-70](#), with just a few differences.

Nehemiah wants to make sure that only the pure Jews were added and so this list would help him do that. In order for Israel to exist as a nation, both Ezra and Nehemiah were very strict concerning the racial purity of the Jews.

THE LIST OF THE EXILES WHO RETURNED

'In company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah): The list of the men of Israel: the descendants of Parosh 2,172 of Shephatiah 372 of Arah 652 of Pahath-Moab (through the line of Jeshua and Joab) 2,818 of Elam 1,254 of Zattu 845 of Zakkai 760 of Binnui 648 of Bebai 628 of Azgad 2,322 of Adonikam 667 of Bigvai 2,067 of Adin 655 of Ater (through Hezekiah) 98 of Hashum 328 of Bezai 324 of Hariph 112 of Gibeon 95 the men of Bethlehem and Netophah 188 of Anathoth 128 of Beth Azmaveth 42 of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth 743 of Ramah and Geba 621 of Mikdash 122 of Bethel and Ai 123 of the other Nebo 52 of the other Elam 1,254 of Harim 320 of Jericho 345 of Lod, Hadid and Ono 721 of Senaah 3,930 The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua) 973 of Immer 1,052 of Pashhur 1,247 of Harim 1,017 The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel through the line of Hodaviah) 74 The musicians: the descendants of Asaph 148 The gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai 138 The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Sia, Padon, Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmi, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Meunim, Nephusim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Nezhiah and Hatipha. The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon. The temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon 392. The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel: the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda 642. And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim. The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 245 male and female singers. There were 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys. Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests. The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.' Nehemiah 7:7-73

After reading through this list of names, we find there are seven distinct groups of people mentioned.

1. The leaders. 2. The men of Israel. 3. The priests. 4. The Levites. 5. The temple servants. 6. The sons of Solomon's servants. 7. Those of uncertain genealogy.

These were the religious leaders of those who had returned from captivity, [Ezra 2:1-70](#).

Zerubbabel, whose name means 'seed of Babylon', possibly because he was born there, appears as the leader of the return to Jerusalem. He's usually described as the son of Shealtiel, [Ezra 3:2](#), but [1 Chronicles 3:19](#) describes him as the son of Shealtiel's brother Pedaiah.

It's probable that Shealtiel died childless, whereupon a Levirate marriage, [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#), resulted in the birth of Zerubbabel, who was thus the actual son of Pedaiah but the legal son of Shealtiel.

Notice the name Nehemiah, this isn't the same Nehemiah who returned to the land in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, [Nehemiah 1:1-13](#).

Also, notice the name Mordecai, this isn't the same Mordecai who was the cousin of Esther, [Esther 2:5-6](#). The event which is taking place here happened before the events of Esther and the later coming of Nehemiah.

Although we may find genealogies very boring to read, to the Jew they were vitally important, especially when it comes to possession of land.

The Levites are mentioned not for the purpose of owning land because God was their inheritance, [Deuteronomy 10:8-9](#), they are mentioned in order to prove that they were from the tribe of Levi so that they could serve as priests in God's temple and minister to God's people, [Numbers 3:3-37](#) / [Numbers 4:3](#).

The total number of Levites was actually less than the number of priests that returned. This means that a remarkably small percentage of the Levites returned from Babylon. The priests were the descendants of Aaron and they were blessed to work in God's temple, [2 Chronicles 31:19](#).

Most of the priests stayed behind in Babylon. The temple servants are called the 'Nethinim' in some translations. They were the descendants of the Gibeonites, who were made special servants of the Levites and the priests at the temple.

The descendants of Solomon were those employed by Solomon who came from other people groups. They came into Israel as foreign proselytes.

The Urim and the Thummim were kept inside the ephod of the priests, [Exodus 28:30](#) / [Leviticus 8:8](#) / [Judges 20:18-28](#) / [Ezra 2:63](#). Urim means 'lights' and Thummim means 'perfections'. They were probably two jewels and although no one really knows how they worked, it appears they simply gave 'yes' or 'no' answers to specific questions. Notice verses 61-65, in which we find that some that had been serving as priests weren't on this list and they were dismissed from their work until their lineage could be proven, the reason for this is to highlight the fact that Nehemiah only wanted those that were qualified to serve.

There's no doubt these first people who returned to Jerusalem were very generous. Their aim is simply to rebuild the altar so that they can begin sacrificing to the Lord. It's clear that their offering was more than enough to get the job done.

Here again, we see the leadership skills of Nehemiah, he wanted to live by God's laws and he encouraged everyone around him to do the same.

The temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra, and the city of Jerusalem was considered rebuilt by the completion of the walls. The Persians had willingly commissioned the work of both Ezra and Nehemiah in order to make Jerusalem an official city of authority for the Persian Empire.

EZRA READS THE LAW

‘When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns.’ Nehemiah 7:73

This verse is actually the start of the next chapter.

NEHEMIAH 8

INTRODUCTION

‘When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.’ Nehemiah

8:1-8

EZRA READS THE LAW

The last verse of the previous chapter, should be the beginning of this chapter, for that reason I’ve included it here. This chapter and the next record of great revival and restoration among the Jews.

The wall was physically rebuilt in the 6th month and now it was time to start building up the spiritual walls, which began in the 7th month of the Jewish calendar, which corresponds with our August and September.

We’re not told where Ezra was or what he was doing before this time but we do know he was a scribe, [Ezra 7:10](#) / [Ezra 7:25](#). Some commentators suggest that he was gone and then came back, others suggest that Ezra had been teaching the people the word of God and in doing so, he was laying the groundwork for what happened at this time in the history of the returnees.

Nehemiah uses the terms ‘law of Moses’ and ‘law of God’ interchangeably, but they refer to the same law. The reason the phrase ‘law of Moses’ is used is simply to remind us that the ‘law of God’ was given through Moses.

Notice that everyone gathered in front of the Water Gate, it was given its name because of an underground stream which ran nearby that was used to provide water for the temple. The Water Gate led into the temple area where a ritual bath was taken by the priests to make them clean to do their duties in the temple.

This area required the use of ‘living water’ or running water, not just water from a well. While this gate was the pathway to living water, it was now going to be used as a place where the living Word of God would be read, [John 4:10](#).

This event was obviously planned because they made a platform made of wood for Ezra to stand on so the people would be to see him and hear him better.

There were six men to his right and 7 men to his left, but we're not told why this was. It's possible they were there to help all these other men that are named and the Levites who were making sure the people understood what they hearing from the Word of God.

Ezra opened the book, that is, the scroll, and began to read early in the morning until midday. When he opened up the book of the Law Moses, the people stood up and listened carefully because they wanted to know what Law said, so they could live their life by it.

We must remember that at this time in history there were only a few copies of the law available, hence, why they greatly cherished hearing the words of God.

Notice that they stood up in respect of the word and lifted their hands in praise. If only people had the same respect for the Word of God today! If only people were just as excited today when they hear or study God's Word.

There were certain men whose responsibility was to instruct the people, that is, help the people to understand what was being readout.

It's worth noting that those who returned from captivity were second and third-generation Jews, and so, they would have spoken in Aramaic, the language of the Persians. When Ezra read the law on this occasion, he would have read it in the Hebrew language, which has now their second language.

When the reading was finished, the people said 'amen, amen' and they raised up their hands as their custom was, and they bowed their heads and they worshipped God. They bowed their heads and worshiped because they were moved by what they heard.

Some commentators suggest that this reading would have taken around 3-6 hours. Unlike today when a preacher goes on for more than thirty minutes, these people are happy just to hear what God had to say in His law.

'Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.' Nehemiah 8:9-12

These verses tell us again that Nehemiah was the governor of Judea and Ezra is a priest and scribe, [Ezra 7:10](#) / [Ezra 7:25](#). Although this was a Holy day and not a day of mourning or weeping, the people were weeping. But why were they weeping?

They were weeping because they had just heard the Law of God being read and their hearts would have been moved when they realised they had sinned against God.

Notice that the people are filled with the joy of the Lord, that's because they now understand the grace of God, [Isaiah 41:18](#) / [John 4:14](#). They are filled with joy because they now realise that they have been forgiven, [John 15:11](#) / [Philippians 4:4](#).

Ezra wants these Jews to rejoice because they have understood the Law of God and they can start from this point forward by keeping the Law of God.

The people listened, and they rejoiced and went off and ate and drank and gave food and drink to those who were in need, [Deuteronomy 16:11](#) / [Deuteronomy 16:14](#). Their repentance is seen in their keeping of the feasts that are described in this and the following chapters.

‘On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters”—as it is written. So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great. Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.’ Nehemiah 8:13-18

They came back the second day wanting to know more, and the Law was read and explained for the seven days of the feast of the temporary shelters. Wouldn't it be so encouraging if Christians today had this same hunger to hear and learn from God's Word more than once a week! [Psalms 119:97](#).

When they had read in the Law that they were to live in temporary shelters, they obeyed the command, [Leviticus 23:40-43](#) / [Leviticus 24:1-9](#). They made sure that everyone was following this command and they gathered all the necessary supplies to build the shelters.

This feast and these temporary shelters were designed to remind them of the forefather's journey in the wilderness where they only had temporary living accommodation as they made their way to the Promise Land. Then on the eighth day, there was a sacred assembly, which was in accordance with the Law, [Leviticus 23:36](#).

Notice the text implies that this feast hadn't been observed in the way it's being described here, since the days of Joshua who lived and led Israel in the conquest of the land about one thousand years before.

Here they are doing it exactly as the Law prescribes and all of them were involved in this feast and it brought them great joy knowing that they were doing what Law required of them.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It is not the intention of the writer to state that the Feast of tabernacles had not been kept from the time of Joshua until this occasion, [1 Kings 8:2](#) / [1 Kings 8:65](#) / [Ezra 3:4](#), but that there had been no such celebration like this since Joshua's time, [2 Kings 23:22](#) / [2 Chronicles 35:18](#).’

From the first day of the feast to the last, for seven days, they read from the law, [1 Timothy 4:13](#).

NEHEMIAH 9

INTRODUCTION

‘On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. Standing on the stairs of the Levites were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Kenani. They cried out with loud voices to the LORD their God. And the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah—said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.” “Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.’ Nehemiah 9:1-5

THE ISRAELITES CONFESS THEIR SINS

In this previous chapter, we read that the people wanted to weep and mourn because they had been living in sin, but the feast wasn't the time to do this, [Nehemiah 8:13-18](#). This chapter records the events which happened two days later and it tells us they can weep and mourn.

They're now ready to demonstrate their sorrow for how they had neglected the Word of God and so, they dress in sackcloth and put dust on their heads. They also confessed their sins to God and separated themselves from all foreigners.

They spent three hours listening to the Word being read out and another three hours confessing their sins and they worshipped God. In order to help them not do what their fathers did, they're now committed to be directed by the word of God.

From the time of the revival of Ezra and Nehemiah forward, the people committed themselves to never again be involved in the practice of idolatry. This is the reason why they put away their foreign wives, [Ezra 10:1-17](#).

The Levites cry out to God and instructed the people to stand up and bless God and His glorious name.

'You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. "You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.' Nehemiah 9:6-8

The Levites now begin to remind the people of what God has done as they continued to cry out to God. They teach that God is the Creator of all things and they begin with Abram, that is, Abraham and the Land Promise which has been fulfilled, [Joshua 23:14](#).

God had promised that from Abraham a great nation would come, and they would receive the land as an inheritance, [Genesis 12:1-3](#).

'You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day. You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take. "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good. You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.' Nehemiah 9:9-15

The Levites continue to remind the people of how God made it possible for them to escape their Egyptian bondage and how He provided them the Law and food. It's here that we learn that God's faithfulness isn't just found in His words but also in His actions.

God protected them from the army of the Egyptians, He provided manna, [Exodus 16:1-36](#) / [Numbers 11:1-9](#), and water, [Exodus 15:25](#), for them in the wilderness and He guided them through the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, [Exodus 19-24](#).

God delivered His Law through His servant Moses, but the Law originated with God. The ten commandments, as well as all the Old Testament Law, came through Moses, [Mark 7:10](#) / [Exodus 20:12](#).

The Old Testament Law was spoken through angels, Hebrews 2:2, but it was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator, that is, Moses, Galatians 3:19 / Acts 7:53.

‘But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them, even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies. “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.’ Nehemiah 9:16-21

Despite their ancestors sinning on several occasions, God, out of love and mercy still helped them and guided them. However, even though God cared for them, they hardened their hearts by refusing to submit in response to His care, Exodus 32:1-10 / Numbers 14:11-24.

It was at Mount Sinai when they rebelled and wanted to return to Egypt. It was during this time that God wanted to destroy Israel as a nation and start a new nation through the lineage of Moses, but because Moses interceded on Israel’s behalf, God showed them mercy Exodus 32:10-14.

Although they deserved to be destroyed, God gave them manna and water so that they could be preserved from the harshness of the wilderness to which they were condemned for forty years of wandering.

Notice the continuous miracle mentioned here, their clothes didn’t wear out and their feet didn’t swell for the whole forty years they were in the wilderness. We must note that their sandals didn’t wear out either during this whole time, Deuteronomy 29:5.

‘You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. You made their children as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their parents to enter and possess. Their children went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you gave the Canaanites into their hands, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they revelled in your great goodness.’ Nehemiah 9:22-25

Here we read of God’s faithfulness in giving Israel the Promised Land and so, fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3 / Joshua 23:14.

It was God who gave them the strength to drive out the Canaanites from the land. Because God strengthened them, Israel subdued and possessed the land, and were well blessed with an abundance of food.

‘But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. “But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time. “You warned them in order to turn them back to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, of which you said, ‘The person who obeys them will live by them.’ Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighbouring peoples. But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.’ Nehemiah 9:26-31

It was during the time of the Judges when the Jews constantly fell away from God and His ways. As a result of their falling away, their enemies would oppress them and then, in desperation, they would call out to God.

God, who was patient with them and in His mercy would hear their cries and have mercy on them. Even though Israel didn't deserve it, God continued to send deliverers to save them from their oppressors, [Judges 2:16](#) / [Judges 3:7-11](#) / [Judges 3:15](#) / [Judges 3:31](#) / [Judges 4:4](#) / [Judges 6:11-13](#) / [Judges 10:11-12](#) / [Judges 10:3-5](#) / [Judges 11:1](#) / [Judges 12:8-10](#) / [Judges 12:11-12](#) / [Judges 12:13-14](#) / [Judges 13:1-25](#).

This cycle of rebellion, bondage, repentance and deliverance carried on throughout their history until the last deliverance into the bondage of the Babylonians.

However, even when God allowed the Jews to be defeated and taken into captivity for 70 years, He didn't bring Israel to an end as a nation, because He allowed a remnant to come back rebuild by His providence.

THE AGREEMENT OF THE PEOPLE

‘Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come on us, on our kings and leaders, on our priests and prophets, on our ancestors and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly. Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways. “But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our ancestors so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.’ In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.” Nehemiah 9:32-38

In these final verses, we find the Levites telling God they have learned their lesson. They now come to understand that everything, especially all the bad things which happened to them was because of their sinfulness.

They now know if they hadn't moved away from God, He wouldn't have moved away from them. They now know that their downfall was all their own doing, they thought their ways were better than God's ways.

The blessings which were coming from the land that was promised to the Jews weren't being used for the king because of their rebellion against God's Word. Instead of being in control of the land, they had become servants of the land for others.

As God had delivered them from those who brought them into bondage in the past, so they were asking for His deliverance from the economic bondage that they were in at the time of this revival.

It's clear that they were making a huge effort to get back to God's Law so they could please Him once again, they want to start anew as a nation.

They decided to make a written covenant with God, stating that they were going to uphold the Law of Moses, [Jeremiah 32:10](#). This was written and sealed by the leaders and was a public proclamation and all the people that sealed this document are listed in [Nehemiah 10:1-27](#), which included Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH 10

INTRODUCTION

‘Those who sealed it were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hakaliah. Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluk, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah. These were the priests. The Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel, and their associates: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mika, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zakkur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani and Beninu. The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluk, Harim and Baanah.’ Nehemiah 10:1-27

This chapter and the next, tell us how the Jews were starting to live by the Law of Moses. The names of the leaders who sealed the covenant for the people, [Nehemiah 9:38](#), were here given for the posterity of Israel to come. It was a document that was verified, and so, the fathers were here binding their children to an agreement with God to remain faithful to the word of God.

By placing their names on the covenant of loyalty, the leaders were placing themselves under an oath to God. The oath was binding as the law of God, and so, it wasn't to be taken lightly.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following about the man named Zedekiah.

‘The identity of this person is not known. Some have supposed him to have been the same as Zadok, but Zadok is found in [Nehemiah 10:21](#), others have imagined that he must have been the governor's secretary, which is as good a guess as any.’

Cook, in his commentary, says the following concerning Ezra, whose name is missing from this list.

‘The seal of the high-priestly house of Seraiah was probably appended, either by Ezra personally or by Eliashib, both of whom were members of that house.’

‘The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, musicians, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighbouring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand—all these now join their fellow Israelites the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord. “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons. “When the neighbouring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts. “We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God. “We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law. “We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the LORD each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. “As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. “Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. “We will not neglect the house of our God.”

Nehemiah 10:28-39

Here we read about four different parts to the covenant they made with God.

1. All of them agreed to keep all the Laws found in the Law of Moses and if they didn't they agreed to be cursed.

2. All of them agreed that they were going to separate themselves from foreigners and they weren't going to allow marriages to take place between them, [Malachi 2:14](#).

Ezra had already dealt with the problem in [Ezra 9-10](#), but these Jews were still trying to do this even though they said they wouldn't, and so, in order to preserve the purity of the Israelite race, they agreed not to intermarry with those of other nations.

3. All of them agreed that they were going to start honouring the Sabbath, which including not trading or working on that day, [Jeremiah 17:21-22](#) / [Amos 8:5](#).

Since the keeping of the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, [Exodus 20:8-11](#), in this context they made a renewed commitment to honouring it. The Sabbath rest was a weekly holiday that was kept only by the Jews.

4. All of them agreed that they were going to honour the Sabbatical year, which happened every 7th year, which was when they would cancel out any debts that were owed them and they would let the fields rest during that year, [Deuteronomy 15](#) / [Leviticus 25](#).

Here they were reviving what Moses taught in [Exodus 30:13-16](#), except Moses had said that all who were twenty years of age and over were to pay half a shekel and this was only done on the rare occasion when a census was done.

Here Nehemiah is speaking about the temple tax, which by the time Christ came along had increased to half a shekel, [Matthew 17:24-27](#).

They drew lots for which priests would gather wood for the temple and so, they made a commitment to provide wood in order that the altar sacrifices continue, [Leviticus 6:12-13](#).

The people were to bring their first fruits of various crops and herds to the temple for God, [Proverbs 3:9-10](#), and by doing so, they were promising to continually support their spiritual leaders who ministered before the Lord on their behalf, [Nehemiah 10:37](#) / [Nehemiah 13:10](#) / [Nehemiah 13:12](#) / [Numbers 18:21-24](#).

So that they could financially make all this happen, they renewed their commitment to pay their tithes and give the first fruits of their crops. The firstborn of their livestock and sons were also committed to the Lord.

They started the tithing process again for the Levites, [Numbers 18:21-28](#) / [Deuteronomy 14:28](#), but here a priest had to be present when a Levite was taking the tithe from someone, which was probably done to keep the Levite from taking more than he was supposed to.

Everyone agrees that they will not neglect the house of God, which isn't necessarily speaking about the temple. They were committed not to neglect, that is, being obedient to God, and His spiritual house, [1 Corinthians 16:1-4](#) / [1 Timothy 3:15](#).

NEHEMIAH 11

INTRODUCTION

'Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.' Nehemiah 11:1-2

THE NEW RESIDENTS OF JERUSALEM

As we enter this chapter, we're reminded that most of the priests and Levites live in Jerusalem and the remainder of the people live in the small towns, villages and farms of Judah.

Here, it appears that Nehemiah wants to have a representative of each family living in Jerusalem. The idea behind this was that people, who lived in those towns and villages could easily be contacted and spoken to through those who live in Jerusalem.

One commentator suggests that the wall around Jerusalem was about four miles long so, as we can imagine it would have taken a lot of men to keep an eye on the city. This is why they were casting lots for those that would live in Jerusalem and the rest would live in other cities.

The casting of lots was a common practice in the Old Testament, [Joshua 7:16-18](#) / [Numbers 26:25-26](#) / [1 Chronicles 24:5](#), and it was used in the New Testament to choose who would take Judas' place, [Acts 1:23-26](#). The outcome of casting lots was chosen by God Himself, not by men, [Proverbs 16:33](#).

'These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the towns of Judah, each on their own property in the various towns, while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem): From the descendants of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez; and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Kol-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totalled 468 men of standing. From the descendants of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai—928 men. Joel son of Zikri was their chief officer, and Judah son of Hassenuah was over the New Quarter of the city. From the priests: Jedaiah; the son of Joarib; Jakin; Seraiah son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the official in charge of the house of God, and their associates, who carried on work for the temple—822 men; Adaiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, and his associates, who were heads of families—242 men; Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, and his associates, who were men of standing—128. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim. From the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the house of God; Mattaniah son of Mika, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. The Levites in the holy city totalled 284. The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and their associates, who kept watch at the gates—172 men. The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on their ancestral property. The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them. The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mika. Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the musicians responsible for the service of the house of God. The musicians were under the king's orders, which regulated their daily activity. Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in all affairs relating to the people. As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, in Jekabzeel and its villages, in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth Pelet, in Hazar Shual, in Beersheba and its settlements, in Ziklag, in Mekonah and its settlements, in En Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its settlements. So they were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom. The descendants of the Benjamites from Geba lived in Mikmash, Aija, Bethel and its settlements, in Anathoth, Nob and Ananiah, in Hazor, Ramah and Gittaim, in Hadid, Zeboim and Neballat, in Lod and Ono, and in Ge Harashim. Some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.' Nehemiah 11:3-36

The rest of this chapter speaks about a register of the heads of the families who would live in Jerusalem. Most didn't live within the walls of the city, but in the remote farms and villages that surrounded Jerusalem.

Because of the casting of lots, it makes it clear that God would have been involved in who stayed in Jerusalem, the list here is a list of those that were chosen and what some of their duties were. The later part of the verses tells us where some of the people went in the other cities outside of Jerusalem.

Cundall, in his commentary, says the following in relation to [Nehemiah 11:3-9](#).

‘All those mentioned in these verses were the rulers of the people, that is, the chiefs, who were already living in Jerusalem.’ There were 1,396 of these.

In [Nehemiah 11:10-18](#), we find a list of the priests which numbered 1,192 and the list of the Levites which numbered 284. Notice that the chief officer, that is, the leader was the one who began the prayers of thanksgiving.

In [Nehemiah 11:19-21](#), we find a list of gatekeepers and their associates which numbered 172. The total number of the men living in Jerusalem is 3,044 but doesn’t include the women and children, or the temple servants.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning [Nehemiah 11:23](#).

‘The goodwill of Artaxerxes toward the ministers employed in the temple service had been previously shown by his exempting them from taxation of every kind, [Ezra 7:24](#). Now, it would seem, he had gone further and assigned to the singers an allowance from the royal revenue.’

The temple servants are involved and the king’s official representative of the king of Persia, Pethahiah.

Many of the places mentioned in these verses are mentioned in [Joshua 15:27-39](#) / [Joshua 18:21-28](#).

NEHEMIAH 12

INTRODUCTION

‘These were the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Joshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluk, Hattush, Shekaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Joshua. The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and also Mattaniah, who, together with his associates, was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. Bakbukiah and Unni, their associates, stood opposite them in the services. Joshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua. In the days of Joiakim, these were the heads of the priestly families: of Seraiah’s family, Meraiah; of Jeremiah’s, Hananiah; of Ezra’s, Meshullam; of Amariah’s, Jehohanan; of Malluk’s, Jonathan; of Shekaniah’s, Joseph; of Harim’s, Adna; of Meremoth’s, Helkai; of Iddo’s, Zechariah; of Ginnethon’s, Meshullam; of Abijah’s, Zikri; of Miniamin’s and of Moadiah’s, Piltai; of Bilgah’s, Shammua; of Shemaiah’s, Jehonathan; of Joiarib’s, Mattenai; of Jedaiah’s, Uzzi; of Sallu’s, Kallai; of Amok’s, Eber; of Hilkiah’s, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah’s, Nethanel. The family heads of the Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, as well as those of the priests, were recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian. The family heads among the descendants of Levi up to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib were recorded in the book of the annals. And the leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua son of Kadmiel, and their associates, who stood opposite them to give praise and thanksgiving, one section responding to the other, as prescribed by David the man of God. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates. They served in the days of Joiakim son of Joshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law.’ Nehemiah 12:1-26

PRIESTS AND LEVITES

This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter in the listing of names. Here the list focuses on the names of the descendants of the priests and Levites who originally went to Jerusalem in the exodus led by Zerubbabel that took place over 90 years before the ministry of Nehemiah.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The number of the names here given, which is 22, is probably to be connected with that of the Davidic ‘courses,’ which was 24, [1 Chronicles 24:7-18](#). Eight names are identical to those of the heads in David’s time. On comparing the present list with that of the families who sealed to Nehemiah’s covenant, [Nehemiah 10:2-8](#), we shall find that the first sixteen recur in that document nearly in the same order; but that the last six are absent from it. It would seem that as these six declined to seal Nehemiah’s covenant, they were placed below the rest here in a sort of supplementary list. Note especially the ‘and’ which connects the second part of the lists with the earlier part, both in [Nehemiah 12:6](#) and in [Nehemiah 12:19](#).’

[Nehemiah 12:1-9](#) speaks about the leaders of the priests and the Levitical families who returned with Zerubbabel.

[Nehemiah 12:10-11](#) names six of the high priests from Jeshua to Jaddua.

[Nehemiah 12:12-21](#) goes back in time and lists the heads of the priestly families during Joakim’s reign, which was before Jerusalem’s captivity.

And finally, [Nehemiah 12:22-26](#) lists the leaders of the Levitical families of Nehemiah’s time.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In [1 Chronicles 9:17](#) / [1 Chronicles 9:24](#) / [1 Chronicles 9:26](#), four families of porters only are mentioned, six are implied here, in [Nehemiah 7:45](#), and [Ezra 2:42](#). From [1 Chronicles 26:14-19](#) it appears that the temple had four chief gates, fronting the cardinal points, and two minor ones, ‘toward Asuppim,’ and ‘at Parbar’.

DEDICATION OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM

‘At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.’ [Nehemiah 12:27-30](#)

These verses cover the details of the dedication of the rebuilt wall, [John 10:22](#) / [1 Maccabees 4:60](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Although our text does not give us the exact date of the dedication, the historical note in, ‘[Second Maccabees 1:18](#) gives the date of the dedication as the twenty fifth of the ninth month, Kislev, only three months after the completion of the wall.’

When the wall was finished being built, [Nehemiah 6:15](#), there was a cause of celebration because they had accomplished their task and Nehemiah was ready to dedicate the wall.

The Levites were called and they purified themselves, [Hebrews 4:12](#) / [1 John 1:9](#), the people and the walls and gates and they also got all the singers and musical instrument players so they could celebrate this great event.

‘I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of

Zakkur, the son of Asaph, and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani—with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the teacher of the Law led the procession. At the Fountain Gate, they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the site of David’s palace to the Water Gate on the east. The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people—past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped. The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets—and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.’ Nehemiah 12:31-43

Here we find that Nehemiah takes the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and had two thanksgiving choirs set up to sing. There were two groups, one led by Ezra and the other led by Nehemiah.

They marched around the top of the wall in opposite directions and came together at the area of the temple, where there was a great celebration.

Although the Jews were under the rule of the Persian Empire, they could rejoice in their identity as a people who had finally come together as one nation in the Promised Land. The Jews were so happy they had finished the wall that you could hear their rejoicing from a great distance away.

Notice that some people were involved with singing and playing instruments. It was David who prescribed musical instruments, that is, he introduced musical instruments into the celebrations of the Jews, [1 Samuel 10:5](#) / [2 Samuel 6:5](#) / [Psalm 150:3](#) / [1 Chronicles 16:42](#) / [1 Chronicles 25:1](#) / [2 Chronicles 5:12](#) / [2 Chronicles 29:25](#).

Although women didn’t usually get involved in Jewish celebrations, here, we find the women and their children enjoying the celebrations. This was a day of national celebration and every one of those who represented the remnant of Israel were to participate in the joyous occasion.

‘At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the musicians and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the musicians and the gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.’ Nehemiah 12:44-47

The reforms mentioned here that Nehemiah made after he returned from the Persian king. Nehemiah was initially in Palestine for twelve years, [Nehemiah 5:14](#) / [Nehemiah 13:6](#), after which he made a brief return to the Persian capital. It’s here we learn that some men had been appointed to collect tithes for the storerooms in Jerusalem, this was to ensure that the priests and the Levites were supported, [2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#). This hadn’t been practised for a long time and the Jews were filled with joy to start this again as God had commanded.

They also purified themselves, [1 Chronicles 23:28](#), and the singers and gatekeepers were to be given a portion of food from the Jews as well.

Cook, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The author is comparing the religious activity and strictness of Nehemiah’s time with that which had prevailed under Zerubbabel, described in [Ezra 6:16-22](#), with the implication that the intermediate period had been a time of laxity.’

NEHEMIAH 13

INTRODUCTION

‘On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent. Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah’s household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.’ Nehemiah 13:1-9

NEHEMIAH’S FINAL REFORMS

After all the celebrations, amens and newly revived spirit toward God and His Word, this chapter tells us the Jews quickly moved away from God because Nehemiah left for a little while, [Exodus 32:1](#).

We read here about the honesty of the people in their efforts to keep the law. When they read in the law that they weren’t to join themselves in any way to the Ammonites or Moabites, they excluded the Ammonites and Moabites from their fellowship, [Genesis 12:3](#) / [Deuteronomy 23:3-5](#) / [Ezra 10:15-44](#).

The problem was the Jews wanted to be friends with everyone, and so, when they allowed foreigners to come in with their teachings about other gods and other ways, they caused the Jews to start following after their false way.

Some of these foreigners like the Ammonites and Moabites were specifically named. Instead of greeting the children of Israel and treating them kindly, they decided to hire Balaam to curse them, but that didn’t work because God intervened and turned that curse into a blessing, [Numbers 22-24](#).

Nehemiah had apparently left and gone back to Persia to see the king, but we don’t know how long he was gone.

Eliashib was the high priest, [Nehemiah 3:1](#), but he had a strong connection with Tobiah, neither marital relationships nor relationships through relatives were to be maintained if they led to compromising or violating the law of God.

Eliashib was related by marriage to Tobiah, [Nehemiah 6:18](#), he was an Ammonite, and a person who previously joined in opposition to Nehemiah, [Nehemiah 2:9-10](#) / [Nehemiah 2:17-20](#) / [Nehemiah 4:6-9](#) / [Nehemiah 6:1-3](#).

Because of this relationship, he had defiled the house of God by taking over a room that was used to store things according to God’s Law and made it a room for Tobiah, [Matthew 23:13-36](#).

When Nehemiah finds out about what had happened, he dealt with the problem straight away, he had all the things in that room that we set up for Tobiah, who was a Gentile, thrown out, and he had the room purified and then all the things that were supposed to be in there were restored, [Matthew 21:12-13](#) / [Mark 11:15-17](#) / [Luke 19:45-46](#) / [John 2:13-17](#).

‘I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. So I rebuked the officials and asked them, “Why is the house of God neglected?” Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts. All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil into the storerooms. I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zakkur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because they were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites.’ Nehemiah 13:10-13

Here we read that not only had the house of God been defiled by the high priest, the rulers and the people had stopped paying their tithes. This was a failure of leadership that led to the lack of support for the Levites and temple servants.

Notice again Nehemiah’s leadership skill, he deals with the problem by asking them why they had neglected the house of the Lord and gets them to start giving their tithes again.

Because the people failed to support the Levites, they had to return to their fields and raise crops for food. During Nehemiah’s absence, while he was in Susa, it seems that the people failed to carry out their promise to support the Levites, [Nehemiah 12:44-47](#) / [2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#).

‘Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services. In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your ancestors do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.” When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. But I warned them and said, “Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you.” From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.’ Nehemiah 13:14-22

This occasion must have broken Nehemiah’s heart, especially after everything he’s done, hence, why he prays again to God to remember all that he did to make the people get back right with God.

The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, [Exodus 20:1-8](#), but while Nehemiah was gone from Judah on his trip back to Susa, the local people were carrying on with their normal business on the Sabbath, despite making an oath that they wouldn’t, [Nehemiah 10:28-39](#).

They were working on the day of rest and trading with foreigners. Their working on the Sabbath is described as a ‘wicked thing’ because they were breaking their covenant with God, [Jeremiah 17:21-27](#). Obviously today as Christians we’re not under the Old Testament law, and not required to keep the Sabbath Day, [Colossians 2:16-17](#).

It appears that these traders from Tyre were more concerned with making a profit than honouring a Jewish Sabbath, [Ezra 3:7](#). Notice Nehemiah rebukes them, not for trading, not because they were Gentiles who weren’t under the law of Moses, but because they were trading on the Sabbath, which in effect would have tempted the Jews to break the Sabbath rules.

In an effort to stop the Gentile traders from doing their business in Jerusalem, Nehemiah instructs them to close the gates of the city at sundown on Friday and didn’t open them again until after the Sabbath, [Matthew 24:20](#), which, although we’re not told, the other towns and villages would have done too.

Notice once again that Nehemiah prays to God to spare him from what the Jews were doing.

‘Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God’s name and said: “You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?” One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me. Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me with favour, my God.’ Nehemiah 13:23-31

The Jews had married foreign women and some of their children couldn’t even speak the language of Judah.

Notice again Nehemiah’s leadership skill in dealing with this problem, he fought with them, beat them and even pulled their hair out until they would swear by God that they would not intermarry with the foreigners anymore.

Then he gave them the example of Solomon and how he sinned against God because he married all those foreign women, [1 Kings 11:3](#), and he allowed them to influence him to set up buildings and altars for their various false gods, [1 Kings 11:6-10](#).

The prophet Malachi prophesied about this corruption of the priesthood in [Malachi 2](#). These priests had intermarried with their enemy and had made them their ally and so, in order to preserve the identity of Israel in Palestine, all the foreigners had to go.

Nehemiah drove Joiada away because of this unlawful practice. Ezra had made the people commit to this, but by the time of Nehemiah’s arrival, they had forgotten their commitment, [Ezra 10:1-44](#).

Notice again that Nehemiah prays to God that he will remember these men who had corrupted the priesthood.

He purifies all the priests by telling them to get rid of any foreign ties from their families, and he gets the priesthood back to what it was supposed to be doing, [Nehemiah 11:10-22](#).

Then one last time Nehemiah prays to God that He will remember the good that he had done.

Sadly, only a few years from now, the Israelites would once again get involved in sin, break their vows and covenant relationship with God, oh how they needed grace, [Romans 8:3](#).

When we think about Nehemiah’s leadership skills, we see that he was a man who was sensitive to the people’s needs, [Nehemiah 1:4](#), he was a man who was totally reliant on God, [Nehemiah 1:4-11](#) / [Nehemiah 2:4](#).

He was a man who was full of ambition for God, [Nehemiah 2:5-8](#), he was a man who used the wisdom of God to deal with problems and get things done, [Nehemiah 4:16-22](#).

He was a man who simply wouldn’t give up, [Nehemiah 6:1-15](#), and he was a man with very high standards, that is, God’s standards, [Nehemiah 10:29-39](#).