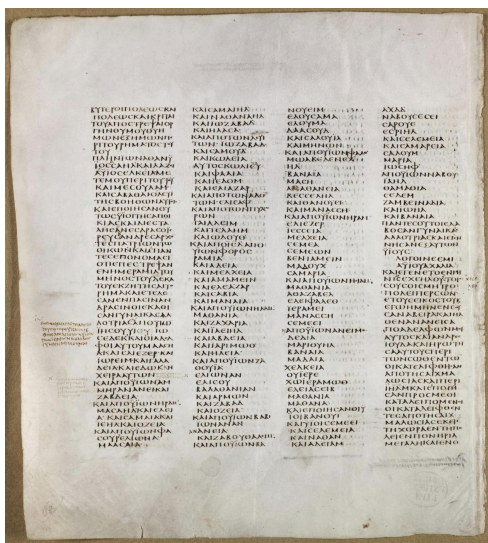


NEHEMIAH

We're Gonna Build a Wall and the Persians Are Gonna Pay For That Wall!

AUTHOR	Nehemiah tells much of the story himself, I and me, 1:1 to 7:5 and parts of chapters 12 and 13. The Talmud says Ezra wrote his book, which then counted Ezra and Nehemiah as one, and that Nehemiah finished the book of Chronicles. Many scholars think the same editor who put Ezra together joined Nehemiah's own memoir to older lists.
EVENTS TOOK PLACE	From Nehemiah's prayer in 446 BC and his trip to Jerusalem in 445 BC to his second visit, after 433 BC.
DATE	About 430 to 400 BC. Some scholars say later, because 12:22 lists high priests down to Jaddua.
WRITTEN TO	The Jews back in Judah, a small group under Persian rule with broken walls and loud enemies.
KEY VERSE	Nehemiah 6:16. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and disheartened, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.



ONE OF THE OLDEST COPIES OF NEHEMIAH

A page of Codex Sinaiticus, copied in Greek about 330 to 360 AD and now in Leipzig, Germany. Greek Bibles count Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, 2 Esdras, so the page ends Ezra's list of names, Ezra 10, and then starts Nehemiah in the last column: The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah, 1:1 to 3.

You may hear the Dead Sea Scrolls hold every book but Esther. That counts Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, as the Hebrew Bible does. No piece of Nehemiah from Qumran has been confirmed; two small pieces sold after 2000 have no known find spot, and experts think they are likely fakes. The oldest complete Hebrew copy is the Leningrad Codex, 1008 AD.

Photo Leipzig University Library, codexsinaiticus.org.

Historical Setting

It starts in Susa, a Persian royal city in what is now Iran, where Nehemiah serves the king his wine. Then it moves to Jerusalem, a small city in ruins, with enemies on every side: Sanballat in Samaria to the north, Tobiah in Ammon to the east, Geshem in Arabia to the south and the people of Ashdod to the west.

What Was Going Wrong

BROKEN WALLS. Jerusalem's walls were torn down and its gates burned, so the people were in great trouble and disgrace 1:3.

ENEMIES. Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem mocked, threatened, lied and hired a false prophet to stop the work 4:1 to 8, 6:1 to 14.

THE RICH ROBBER THE POOR. Rich Jews charged their poor brothers interest and took their fields and their children 5:1 to 5.

SLIPPING BACK. While Nehemiah was away, the people let Tobiah live in the temple, stopped paying the Levites, sold on the Sabbath and married women who served other gods 13:4 to 27.

The Idiot Proof Summary

About 13 years after Ezra came home, by most counts, Nehemiah, the Persian king's cup-bearer, hears that Jerusalem's walls are still rubble. He weeps, prays and asks the king to send him. The king says yes and even pays for the lumber, 2:8. Nehemiah gets every family to rebuild a piece of the wall, with a tool in one hand and a weapon close by. Enemies mock, plot and lie, but the wall is finished in 52 days. Then Ezra reads God's law to the people, they weep, celebrate and sign a promise to obey. When Nehemiah comes back years later, they have slipped, and he cleans house. Pray first, then build, and keep watch.

Nehemiah at a Glance

CH 1 to 2

THE PRAYER AND THE PLAN

Bad news, tears and a yes from the king.

CH 3

WHO BUILT WHAT

Every family takes a piece of the wall.

CH 4 to 6

ENEMIES INSIDE AND OUT

Swords, debts and tricks; done in 52 days.

CH 7

THE LIST

The families who came home.

CH 8 to 10

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE

Ezra reads, the people weep, then sign.

CH 11 to 12

MOVING IN AND THE PARTY

Two choirs on the wall.

CH 13

THE CLEANUP

Nehemiah's second visit.

Where Jesus Shows Up

NEHEMIAH 2:1 TO 8 The king's order to rebuild Jerusalem is where many start counting Daniel's seventy weeks to the Messiah, Daniel 9:25. See the Big Question Seventy Weeks and 445 BC.

NEHEMIAH 8:8 The Levites read God's law and explained it so the people understood. After He rose, Jesus explained what all the Scriptures said about Himself, Luke 24:27.

NEHEMIAH 13:8 Nehemiah threw Tobiah's things out of the temple storeroom. Jesus drove the sellers out of the temple courts and said, Stop turning My Father's house into a market-place, John 2:16.

GOD'S NAMES IN NEHEMIAH

The God of heaven, 1:4 and 2:4, Yahweh, the great and awesome God, 1:5, and the Lord, great and awesome, 4:14 and 1:11. See Why We Say Yahweh in the Old Testament Introduction.

What to Watch for in Nehemiah

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE	1:8-9
THE HEART	2:12, 7:5, 9:8
ARCHAEOLOGY	2:10, 2:19, 3:1, 3:8, 12:22
DEMONIC	9:18
NOTABLE	1:4, 2:4, 4:14, 6:3, 8:10
GOD SPEAKING	Words in red are God speaking. Only the words He actually said are red.
BLOODLINE OF CHRIST	Names underlined in red are in the family line of Jesus.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

52 DAYS

The whole wall went up in 52 days, 6:15. Even the enemies admitted God did it, 6:16.

ONE BOOK WITH EZRA

The Hebrew Bible counted Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Greek Bibles call it 2 Esdras. Hebrew Bibles were printed as two books from the 1500s.

REAL PEOPLE

Sanballat's sons and Johanan the high priest are named in a letter from 407 BC, and Geshem's son is named on a silver bowl. See the Field Notes pages.

How Did It Turn Out?

The walls stood, Jerusalem filled up again and the people promised to keep God's law, even if they kept slipping. Nehemiah's story is the last history in the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi preached about the same time, and then about 400 years passed before Jesus.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE | NOTABLE | GOD SPEAKING

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

Nehemiah has a great job in the Persian palace. Then his brother brings bad news: Jerusalem's walls are rubble and the people are a joke. Nehemiah sits down and cries for days. Then he prays a big prayer, owns his people's sin, and asks God for favor with the king.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER // DEUTERONOMY 30:1-10

¹These are the words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ²Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived with men from Judah. So I questioned them about the remnant of the Jews who had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

³And they told me, "The remnant who survived the exile are there in the province, in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

⁴When I heard these words, I sat down and wept. I mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

⁵Then I said:

"O Yahweh, God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of loving devotion with those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶let Your eyes be open and Your ears attentive to hear the prayer that I, Your servant, now pray before You day and night for Your servants, the Israelites.

I confess the sins that we Israelites have committed against You. Both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have behaved corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, statutes, and ordinances that You gave Your servant Moses.

■ **NEH 1:1 [NOTE]** NEHEMIAH. His name means Yahweh comforts. The month of Chislev in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes was about December 446 BC. Susa was a Persian royal city in what is now Iran.

■ **NEH 1:2 [NOTE]** HANANI. Nehemiah's brother. Later Nehemiah put him in charge of Jerusalem, 7:2.

■ **NEH 1:4 [NOTABLE]** Bad news from home broke his heart. Before he made a plan, he cried, fasted and prayed for days.

⁸Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses when You said, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,' ⁹but if you return to Me and keep and practice My commandments, then even if your exiles have been banished to the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.'

¹⁰They are Your servants and Your people. You redeemed them by Your great power and mighty hand. ¹¹O Lord, may Your ear be attentive to my prayer and to the prayers of Your servants who delight to revere Your name. Give Your servant success this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

(At that time I was the cupbearer to the king.)

2

CHAPTER 2 IN 30 SECONDS

The king notices Nehemiah's sad face and asks what is wrong. Nehemiah shoots up a quick prayer and asks to go rebuild. The king says yes and even pays for the lumber. Nehemiah rides around the broken walls at night, then tells the leaders, Let us build. The neighbors laugh.

NEHEMIAH SENT TO JERUSALEM

¹Now in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was set before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence, ²so the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, though you are not ill? This could only be sadness of the heart."

■ **NEH 1:8 [FULFILLS]** Even in exile God would not reject Israel but remember His covenant ← LEV 26:44-45 p.~

■ **NEH 1:8 [FULFILLS]** Yahweh will gather you again from all the nations where He has scattered you; if any are driven to the farthest parts under heaven, He will bring you back ← DT 30:1-5 · MEDIUM p.~

■ **NEH 1:8 [NOTE]** QUOTING MOSES. Nehemiah quotes what God told Moses, a blend of Leviticus 26:33 and Deuteronomy 30:1 to 4, so God's words print red. Nehemiah's own prayer stays black.

■ **NEH 1:11 [NOTE]** CUPBEARER. He served the king's wine and may have tasted it first to check for poison. It was a trusted job, close to the king every day.

■ **NEH 2:1 [NOTE]** THE TWENTIETH YEAR. The month of Nisan in Artaxerxes' twentieth year was spring 445 BC. Many count Daniel's seventy weeks from this order. See the Big Question Seventy Weeks and 445 BC.

■ **NEH 2:1 [FIELD NOTES]** See the Artaxerxes Field Notes page in Ezra, p.~.

NOTABLE

I was overwhelmed with fear ³ and replied to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should I not be sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

⁴ "What is your request?" replied the king.

So I prayed to the God of heaven ⁵ and answered the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city where my fathers are buried, so that I may rebuild it."

⁶ Then the king, with the queen seated beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set a time.

⁷ I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may letters be given to me for the governors west of the Euphrates, so that they will grant me safe passage until I reach Judah. ⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house I will occupy."

And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

SEVENTY WEEKS AND 445 BC

The Count

NEHEMIAH 2:1 TO 8 · DANIEL 9:24 TO 27

THE PROPHECY

The angel Gabriel told Daniel that seventy weeks, seventy sevens, were set for Jerusalem. From the word to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until an Anointed One, a ruler, would be seven weeks and sixty two weeks. After that the Anointed One would be cut off, Daniel 9:24 to 26.

■ NEH 2:4 [NOTABLE] The king asked a question, and Nehemiah shot up a prayer before he answered. You can pray in the middle of a conversation.

■ NEH 2:8 [NOTE] THE PERSIANS PAID. The king's forest gave the beams for the gates, the wall and Nehemiah's house. That is what this book's subtitle is about. The people still did the work themselves.

WEEKS OF YEARS

Most read each week as seven years.

Sixty nine weeks is 483 years.

WHICH WORD?

Four orders could be the start: Cyrus sends the Jews home, 538 BC, Ezra 1. Darius backs the temple, 520 BC, Ezra 6. Artaxerxes sends Ezra, 458 or 457 BC, Ezra 7. Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah to rebuild the city and its walls, 445 or 444 BC, Nehemiah 2.

WHY NEHEMIAH 2?

Those who start here say it is the only order about rebuilding the city itself, not just the temple. Others point to Isaiah 44:28, where God says Cyrus will order Jerusalem rebuilt. Nehemiah's order came in the month of Nisan, the spring of 445 BC.

Every View

LUKE 3:1 · 3:23 · 19:41 TO 44 · MATTHEW 24:15

VIEW 1: 457 BC TO JESUS' BAPTISM

Many Protestant teachers start with Ezra's order, 457 BC. 483 years later is about AD 27, when Jesus was baptized and began to preach, Luke 3:1 and 3:23. They see Jesus cut off three and a half years later, in the middle of the last week.

VIEW 2: 445 BC TO PALM SUNDAY

Sir Robert Anderson, in 1881, started with Nehemiah 2 and counted years of 360 days, the length used in Revelation 11 and 12. He landed on the week Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Harold Hoehner later counted from 444 BC to AD 33. Many who hold this view say the last week is still to come.

VIEW 3: THE TIME OF THE MACCABEES

Many scholars start with Jeremiah's word or Cyrus and do not take the numbers as exact. They see the Anointed One cut off as Onias, a high priest killed in 171 BC, and the end in the days of Antiochus, 167 to 164 BC.

VIEW 4: JEWISH READINGS

Many Jewish teachers count from the first temple's fall to the second temple's fall in AD 70. They do not see Jesus in it.

JESUS AND THE TIMING

On Palm Sunday Jesus wept over Jerusalem because it did not know the

THE HEART | ARCHAEOLOGY

time of its visitation, Luke 19:41 to 44. He also quoted Daniel about the abomination that causes desolation, Matthew 24:15.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Daniel tied God's timetable to a word to rebuild Jerusalem. The sides differ on which word, and on how to count the years.

⁹ Then I went to the governors west of the Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

¹⁰ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were deeply disturbed that someone had come to seek the well-being of the Israelites.

NEHEMIAH INSPECTS THE WALLS

¹¹ After I had arrived in Jerusalem and had been there three days, ¹² I set out at night with a few men. I did not tell anyone what my God had laid on my heart to do for Jerusalem. The only animal with me was the one on which I was riding.

¹³ So I went out at night through the Valley Gate toward the Well of the Serpent and the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken down and the gates that had been destroyed by fire.

¹⁴ Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to get through; ¹⁵ so I went up the valley by night and inspected the wall. Then I headed back and reentered through the Valley Gate.

¹⁶ The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, for I had not yet told the Jews or priests or nobles or officials or any other workers. ¹⁷ Then I said to

them, "You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned down. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we will no longer be a disgrace."

¹⁸ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me, and what the king had said to me.

"Let us start rebuilding," they replied, and they set their hands to this good work.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard about this, they mocked us and ridiculed us, saying, "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

²⁰ So I answered them and said, "The God of heaven is the One who will grant us success. We, His servants, will start rebuilding, but you have no portion, right, or claim in Jerusalem."

3

CHAPTER 3 IN 30 SECONDS

The work list. Family by family and gate by gate, everyone grabs a section of the wall. Priests, goldsmiths, perfume makers, rulers and even one man's daughters pitch in. A few nobles will not get their hands dirty.

THE BUILDERS OF THE WALLS

¹ At the Sheep Gate, Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests began rebuilding. They dedicated it and installed its doors. After building as far as the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel, they dedicated the wall. ² The men of Jericho built next to Eliashib, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.

³ The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and installed its doors, bolts, and bars. ⁴ Next to

■ NEH 2:10 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Elephantine Papyri → FIELD NOTES p.7

■ NEH 2:10 [NOTE] SANBALLAT AND TOBIAH. Sanballat was governor of Samaria. Tobiah was an official from Ammon, east of the Jordan. See Who Were the Samaritans? in 2 Kings, p.-.

■ NEH 2:12 [HEART] Nehemiah told no one what his God had put in his heart to do for Jerusalem.

■ NEH 2:13 [NOTE] THE NIGHT RIDE. Nehemiah rode out the Valley Gate on the west side and around the south end of the city. In places there was so much rubble his animal could not get through, 2:14.

■ NEH 2:19 [ARCHAEOLOGY] A silver bowl from Tell el Maskhuta in Egypt names Qaynu son of Geshem, king of Qedar, see The Geshem Bowl Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.8

■ NEH 3:1 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Eilat Mazar dug a tower and wall in the City of David that she dated to Nehemiah's day, see the Nehemiah's Wall? Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.10

■ NEH 3:1 [NOTE] THE SHEEP GATE. The tour of the wall starts at the north side, near the temple, and goes around the city counterclockwise, west first. Jesus healed a man at a pool near the Sheep Gate, John 5:2. See The Pool of Bethesda Field Notes page in John, p.-.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

THE ELEPHANTINE PAPYRI

NEHEMIAH 2:10 · 2:19 · 4:1 TO 2 · 12:22 · 13:28



The front of the letter to Bagohi, governor of Judah, written in Aramaic in 407 BC. Johanan and the sons of Sanballat are named on the back of the papyrus. Printed by Eduard Sachau in 1907. Public domain.

WHAT IT IS

Letters and contracts written in Aramaic on papyrus by a colony of Jewish soldiers and their families. They lived on Elephantine, an island in the Nile in southern Egypt, and guarded the border for the king of Persia. The page shows their most famous letter.

HOW OLD IT IS

The letter is dated to year 17 of King Darius, late in 407 BC. That is Darius II. Most think he is the Darius the Persian named in 12:22. It was written about 38 years after Nehemiah came to Jerusalem.

WHERE AND WHEN FOUND

German diggers found it on Elephantine in 1907, and Eduard Sachau printed it the same year. It is in a museum in Berlin.

WHAT THE LETTER SAYS

Egyptian priests had torn down the Jews' temple to Yahu, their name for Yahweh, in 410 BC. The Jewish leader Jedaniah and the priests begged Bagohi, the Persian governor of Judah, to let them rebuild it.

SANBALLAT'S SONS

The letter says they also wrote to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat,

governor of Samaria. That is Nehemiah's enemy, 2:10. By 407 BC his sons were doing his work, which fits an old man who had been in power in 445 BC.

JOHANAN THE HIGH PRIEST

They had written earlier to Johanan the high priest in Jerusalem and his fellow priests, and got no answer. Johanan is in the list of high priests in 12:22, right after Joiada son of Eliashib. Most think he was Eliashib's grandson; 12:23 calls him his son, meaning descendant.

THE ANSWER

A short note records the reply from Bagohi and Delaiah: rebuild the house of the altar and offer grain offerings and incense there. Animal sacrifices are not mentioned. Some think Jerusalem's priests wanted those kept for the temple in Jerusalem. Others think it kept peace with the Egyptian priests of Khnum, a ram god.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

The letters never name Nehemiah. They show that Sanballat of Samaria and Johanan the high priest were real men, in the right places, at the right time.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH FOR THE BOWL · MOST LINK IT TO NEHEMIAH'S GESHEM

THE GESHEM BOWL

NEHEMIAH 2:19 · 6:1 TO 2 · 6:6 · ISAIAH 21:16 TO 17



A silver bowl from Tell el Maskhuta, Egypt, about 410 BC. The line of Aramaic on the rim names Qaynu son of Geshem, king of Qedar. Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 54.50.34. Brooklyn Museum photograph.

WHAT IT IS

A shallow silver bowl about six inches across. A line of Aramaic scratched on its rim says: what Qaynu son of Geshem, king of Qedar, brought to Han Ilat. Han Ilat was an Arab goddess. The bowl spells the name the same way as Geshem in 2:19. In 6:6 the Hebrew spells it a little longer, Gashmu.

HOW OLD IT IS

About 410 BC, about 35 years after Nehemiah came to Jerusalem. If Qaynu was king then, his father Geshem ruled a little earlier, in Nehemiah's day.

WHERE AND WHEN FOUND

At Tell el Maskhuta in the east of the Nile Delta, in Egypt, with other silver bowls, coins and jewelry from a shrine. The Brooklyn Museum in New York bought it in 1954, and Isaac Rabinowitz printed its writing in 1956.

WHO WAS QEDAR?

A strong Arab kingdom in the desert east and south of Judah. The Bible names Kedar many times, Isaiah 21:16 and Jeremiah 49:28. In Persian times the kings of

Qedar ran the trade routes from Arabia to Gaza and Egypt.

GESHEM THE ARAB

The Bible just calls him Geshem the Arab, 2:19. The bowl shows his family were kings. He joined Sanballat and Tobiah to mock the builders, and he backed the lie that Nehemiah wanted to be king, 6:6.

WHY AN ARAB KING CARED

Many think a strong Jerusalem worried him because it sat near his trade roads. A walled city with its own governor could change who controlled the money.

ANOTHER GESHEM

Writing on a rock at Dedan, in what is now Saudi Arabia, is dated in the days of Gashm son of Shahr. Many scholars think he is the same man, which would make him a king over a large part of Arabia.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

The bowl names the son, not Geshem himself, and it does not mention Nehemiah. It shows that a king named Geshem ruled the Arabs near Judah at the time the Bible says.

ARCHAEOLOGY BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

them, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, made repairs. Next to him, Meshullam son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs; and next to him, Zadok son of Baana made repairs as well. ⁵Next to him, the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.

⁶ The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and installed its doors, bolts, and bars. ⁷Next to them, repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, and the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, who were under the authority of the governor of the region west of the Euphrates. ⁸Next to them, Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. And next to him, Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs. They fortified Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall.

⁹Next to them, Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, made repairs; ¹⁰next to him, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs across from his house; and next to him, Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs. ¹¹Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahathmoab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. ¹²And next to them, Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of the other half-district of Jerusalem, made repairs, with the help of his daughters.

¹³ The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it, installed its doors, bolts, and bars, and repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

¹⁴ The Dung Gate was repaired by Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem. He rebuilt it and installed its doors, bolts, and bars.

¹⁵ The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shalun son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofed it, and in-

stalled its doors, bolts, and bars. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Shelah near the king's garden, as far as the stairs that descend from the City of David.

¹⁶ 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 Mighty.

¹⁷ Next to him, the Levites made repairs under Rehum son of Bani, and next to him, Hashabiah, ruler of a half-district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸ Next to him, their countrymen made repairs under Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. ¹⁹ And next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory, near the angle in the wall.

²⁰ Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai diligently repaired another section, from the angle to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the doorway of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house. ²² And next to him, the priests from the surrounding area made repairs.

²³ 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. ²⁴ After him, Binnui son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the angle and the corner, ²⁵ and Palal son of Uzai made repairs opposite the angle and the tower that juts out from the upper palace of the king near the courtyard of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiah son of Parosh ²⁶ and the temple servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the tower that juts out. ²⁷ And next to them, the Tekoites repaired

■ NEH 3:8 [ARCHAEOLOGY] The Broad Wall

■ NEH 3:8 [FIELD NOTES] See The Broad Wall Field Notes page in Isaiah, p. 7.

■ NEH 3:15 [NOTE] THE POOL OF SHELAH. Most think this is the Pool of Siloam, fed by Hezekiah's tunnel. See The Siloam Tunnel Inscription in Isaiah and The Pool of Siloam in John, p. 7. The City of David is the oldest part of Jerusalem; see The City of David in 2 Samuel, p. 7.

DEBATED FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: DEBATED · THE DATE OF THE TOWER

NEHEMIAH'S WALL?

NEHEMIAH 2:13 TO 15 · 3:1 TO 32 · 4:2 · 6:15 · 7:4



The Stepped Stone Structure in the City of David, with the square tower at its top that Eilat Mazar linked to Nehemiah. The rails and buildings are modern. Photo Ian Scott, CC BY SA 2.0.

WHAT IT IS

A big square tower and a wall at the top of the Stepped Stone Structure, on the east edge of the City of David, the oldest part of Jerusalem. In 2007 the archaeologist Eilat Mazar said the tower and wall were built by Nehemiah.

HOW OLD IT IS

Debated. Mazar dated pottery under the tower to the 400s BC, so she said it was built in Nehemiah's day or soon after. Israel Finkelstein and others say the finds point to the 100s BC, when the Hasmonean kings rebuilt Jerusalem's walls.

WHO DUG THERE

Kathleen Kenyon dug here in the 1960s. She dated this tower to the 100s BC, but she thought a wall she found on the top of the slope was Nehemiah's. Mazar dug again from 2005.

A SMALL CITY

Most scholars think Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day was small, mostly on the ridge of the City of David. That helps explain how a wall could go up in 52 days, 6:15, and why the city felt empty, 7:4.

OLD STONES

The builders did not start from nothing.

Burned stones lay in heaps of rubble, 4:2, and in many places they repaired the old wall, 3:8. Some think they built a new line along the top of the hill instead of the old one down the slope.

THE NIGHT RIDE

Nehemiah rode out the Valley Gate, past the Dung Gate and the Fountain Gate, and up the valley, 2:13 to 15. Most put those gates on the west and south sides of the City of David.

JUDAH IN PERSIAN TIMES

Small clay jar handles stamped Yehud, the Aramaic name for Judah under Persian rule, have been found in Jerusalem. They show there was a small province with its own officials, just like the Bible says.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

No writing names Nehemiah, and no one knows for sure if this tower is his. The Bible's wall was real either way; the question is only which stones are left.

NOTABLE

another section, from a point opposite the great tower that juts out to the wall of Ophel.

²⁸ Above the Horse Gate, each of the priests made repairs in front of his own house. ²⁹ Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house, and next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard of the East Gate, made repairs.

³⁰ Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, as well as Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berechiah made repairs opposite his own quarters.

³¹ Next to him, Malchijah, 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 upper room above the corner. ³² And between the upper room above the corner and the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.

4

CHAPTER 4 IN 30 SECONDS

The enemies mock, then plot an attack. Nehemiah prays and posts guards. Half the men build while half hold spears, and the builders work with a sword strapped on. A trumpet man stays close, and Nehemiah and his men do not even change clothes at night.

THE WORK RIDICULED

¹ Now when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he was furious and filled with indignation. He ridiculed the Jews ² before his associates and the army of Samaria, saying, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Can they restore the wall by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble?"

³ Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, "If even a fox were to climb up on what they are building, it would break down their wall of stones!"

⁴ Hear us, O God, for we are despised. Turn their scorn back upon their own

heads, and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity. ⁵ Do not cover up their iniquity or let their sin be blotted out from Your sight, for they have provoked the builders.

⁶ So we rebuilt the wall until all of it was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

⁷ When Sanballat and Tobiah, together with the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites, heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they were furious, ⁸ and all of them conspired to come and fight against Jerusalem and create a hindrance.

DISCOURAGEMENT OVERCOME

⁹ So we prayed to our God and posted a guard against them day and night.

¹⁰ Meanwhile, the people of Judah said:

"The strength of the laborer fails,
and there is so much rubble
that we will never be able
to rebuild the wall."

¹¹ And our enemies said, "Before they know or see a thing, we will come into their midst, kill them, and put an end to the work."

¹² At that time the Jews who lived nearby came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

¹³ So I stationed men behind the lowest sections of the wall, at the vulnerable areas. I stationed them by families with their swords, spears, and bows.

¹⁴ After I had made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that we were aware of their scheme and that God had frustrated it, each of us returned to his own work on the wall. ¹⁶ And from that day on, half of my servants did the work while

■ NEH 4:2 [NOTE] HEAPS OF RUBBLE. The old stones were still lying there, burned. Using them again helped the wall go up fast.

■ NEH 4:14 [NOTABLE] When fear hits, remember how big God is, then fight for the people you love.

the other half held spears, shields, bows, and armor.

The officers stationed themselves behind all the people of Judah ¹⁷ who were rebuilding the wall. The laborers who carried materials worked with one hand and held a weapon with the other. ¹⁸ And each of the builders worked with his sword strapped at his side. But the trumpeter stayed beside me.

¹⁹ Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: "The work is great and extensive, and we are spread out far from one another along the wall. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the horn, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us!"

²¹ So we continued the work, while half of the men held spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. ²² At that time I also said to the people, "Let every man and his servant spend the night inside Jerusalem, so that they can stand guard by night and work by day."

²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the guards with me changed out of our clothes; each carried his weapon, even to go for water.

5

CHAPTER 5 IN 30 SECONDS

Trouble from inside. Rich Jews are charging their poor brothers interest and taking their fields and even their kids. Nehemiah gets angry, calls a big meeting and makes them give it all back. As governor he refuses his own food allowance for twelve years.

NEHEMIAH DEFENDS THE OPPRESSED

¹ About that time there was a great outcry from the people and their wives against their fellow Jews.

² Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous. We must get grain in order to eat and stay alive."

³ Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our homes to get grain during the famine."

⁴ Still others were saying, "We have borrowed money to pay the king's tax on our

fields and vineyards. ⁵ We and our children are just like our countrymen and their children, yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless to redeem them because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

⁶ When I heard their outcry and these complaints, I became extremely angry, ⁷ and after serious thought I rebuked the nobles and officials, saying, "You are exacting usury from your own brothers!"

So I called a large assembly against them ⁸ and said, "We have done our best to buy back our Jewish brothers who were sold to foreigners, but now you are selling your own brothers, that they may be sold back to us!"

But they remained silent, for they could find nothing to say.

⁹ 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 foreign enemies? ¹⁰ I, as well as my brothers and my servants, have been lending the people money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury. ¹¹ Please restore to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses, along with the percentage of the money, grain, new wine, and oil that you have been assessing them."

¹² "We will restore it," they replied, "and will require nothing more from them. We will do as you say."

So I summoned the priests and required of the nobles and officials an oath that they would do what they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "May God likewise shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. May such a man be shaken out and have nothing!"

The whole assembly said, "Amen," and they praised Yahweh. And the people did as they had promised.

■ **NEH 5:1 [NOTE] DEBT SLAVERY.** See the Big Question Debt Slavery.

■ **NEH 5:11 [NOTE] THE PERCENTAGE.** The Hebrew says the hundredth. Many think it means one percent a month, twelve percent a year, charged to poor brothers.

THE BIG QUESTION

DEBT SLAVERY*The Problem*

NEHEMIAH 5:1 TO 19 • EXODUS 22:25 • LEVITICUS 25:35 TO 43

THE CRY

There was a famine. Some families mortgaged their fields to buy grain. Others borrowed money to pay the king's tax. Some had already sold their daughters as servants to pay their debts, 5:1 to 5.

WHO WAS DOING IT

Not the enemies. The nobles and officials of Judah were charging their own brothers interest, 5:7.

WHAT THE LAW SAID

Do not charge interest to a poor brother, Exodus 22:25. A brother who falls on hard times is not to be worked as a slave, Leviticus 25:35 to 43. Every seventh year, cancel the debts, Deuteronomy 15:1 to 2.

NEHEMIAH GOT ANGRY

He was very angry, but he thought it over first, 5:6 to 7. Then he called a big meeting and said it in front of everyone.

The Fix

DEUTERONOMY 15:1 TO 11 • PROVERBS 22:7 • LUKE 6:35

THE FIX

Give back their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses today, and the interest too, 5:11. The leaders said, We will. Nehemiah made them swear before the priests, 5:12.

HE LED BY EXAMPLE

For twelve years as governor he did not take the governor's food allowance. He fed 150 Jews and officials at his own table and paid for it himself, 5:14 to 18. He and his men had been lending money and grain too, and he said, Let us stop this, 5:10.

WHAT ABOUT INTEREST TODAY?

For centuries the church forbade charging interest. Today most Christians think fair interest on a business loan is fine, but taking advantage of someone in trouble is not.

FOR TODAY

The borrower is slave to the lender, Proverbs 22:7. Jesus said, Lend, expect-

ing nothing in return, Luke 6:35. Do not get rich off someone else's hard times, and help a brother get free.

NEHEMIAH'S GENEROSITY

¹⁴ Furthermore, from the day King Artaxerxes appointed me to be their governor in the land of Judah, from his twentieth year until his thirty-second year (twelve years total), neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.

¹⁵ The governors before me had heavily burdened the people, taking from them bread and wine plus a pound of silver. Their servants also oppressed the people. But I did not do this, because of my fear of God. ¹⁶ Instead, I devoted myself to the construction of the wall, and all my servants were gathered there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

¹⁷ There were 150 Jews and officials at my table, besides the guests from the surrounding nations. ¹⁸ Each day one ox, six choice sheep, and some fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine was provided. But I did not demand the food allotted to the governor, because the burden on the people was so heavy.

¹⁹ Remember me favorably, O my God, for all that I have done for this people.

6**CHAPTER 6 IN 30 SECONDS**

The enemies try tricks. Four invitations to a meeting, a fake letter and a hired prophet who tells Nehemiah to hide in the temple. Nehemiah says, I am doing a great work and cannot come down. The wall is finished in 52 days.

SANBALLAT'S CONSPIRACY

¹ When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left—though to that time I had not yet installed the doors in the gates—² 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 planning to harm me.

■ NEH 5:14 [NOTE] TWELVE YEARS. From 445 to 433 BC.

NOTABLE

³ So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it to go down to you?"

⁴ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave the same reply.

⁵ The fifth time, Sanballat sent me this same message by his young servant, who had in his hand an unsealed letter ⁶ that read:

"It is reported among the nations—and Geshem agrees—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and this is why you are building the wall. According to these reports, you are to become their king, ⁷ and you have even appointed prophets in Jerusalem to proclaim on your behalf: 'There is a king in Judah.' Soon these rumors will reach the ears of the king. So come, let us confer together."

⁸ Then I sent him this reply: "There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind."

⁹ For they were all trying to frighten us, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will never be finished."

But now, my God, strengthen my hands.

¹⁰ Later, I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his house. He said:

"Let us meet at the house of God inside the temple.

Let us shut the temple doors because they are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you!"

¹¹ But I replied, "Should a man like me run away? Should one like me go into the temple to save his own life? I will not go!"

¹² I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had uttered this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He had been hired to intimi-

date me so that I would sin by doing as he suggested, so they could give me a bad name in order to discredit me.

¹⁴ O my God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the other prophets who tried to intimidate me.

COMPLETION OF THE WALL

¹⁵ So the wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth of Elul. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and disheartened, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

¹⁷ Also in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters kept coming to them. ¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, since he was a son-in-law of Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berechiah.

¹⁹ Moreover, these nobles kept reporting to me Tobiah's good deeds, and they relayed my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

7

CHAPTER 7 IN 30 SECONDS

Nehemiah puts guards on the gates. The city is big but almost empty, so he finds the old list of the families who came home first, and the chapter repeats it. The families give gold coins, silver and priests' robes.

SECURING THE CITY

¹ When the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites were appointed.

² Then I put my brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, along with Hananiah the commander of the fortress, because he was a faithful man who feared God more than most. ³ And I told them, "Do not open the gates of Jerusalem until the sun is hot. While the guards are on duty, keep the doors shut and securely fastened. And

■ **NEH 6:3 [NOTABLE]** His enemies kept inviting him to a meeting to hurt him. He said no four times. Not every meeting deserves your time.

■ **NEH 6:10 [NOTE]** A TRAP. Only priests could go inside the temple building, Numbers 18:7. If Nehemiah hid there, he would sin and lose the people's trust, 6:13.

■ **NEH 6:15 [NOTE]** 52 DAYS. The 25th of Elul was about early October 445 BC. The writer Josephus, about 93 AD, says it took two years and four months, but the Bible says 52 days.

THE HEART BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

appoint the residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some at their own homes."

THE LIST OF RETURNING EXILES // EZRA 2:1-67

⁴ Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. ⁵ Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials, and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. I found the genealogical register of those who had first returned, and I found the following written in it:

⁶ These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles carried away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar its king. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, ⁷ accompanied by Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

This is the count of the men of Israel:

⁸ the descendants of Parosh, 2,172;

⁹ the descendants of Shephatiah, 372;

¹⁰ the descendants of Arah, 652;

¹¹ the descendants of Pahath-moab (through the line of Jeshua and Joab), 2,818;

¹² the descendants of Elam, 1,254;

¹³ the descendants of Zattu, 845;

¹⁴ the descendants of Zaccai, 760;

¹⁵ the descendants of Binnui, 648;

¹⁶ the descendants of Bebai, 628;

¹⁷ the descendants of Azgad, 2,322;

¹⁸ the descendants of Adonikam, 667;

¹⁹ the descendants of Bigvai, 2,067;

²⁰ the descendants of Adin, 655;

²¹ the descendants of Ater (through Hezekiah), 98;

²² the descendants of Hashum, 328;

²³ the descendants of Bezai, 324;

²⁴ the descendants of Hariph, 112;

²⁵ the descendants of Gibeon, 95;

²⁶ the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188;

²⁷ the men of Anathoth, 128;

²⁸ the men of Beth-azmaveth, 42;

²⁹ the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743;

³⁰ the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;

³¹ the men of Michmash, 122;

³² the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;

³³ the men of the other Nebo, 52;

³⁴ the descendants of the other Elam, 1,254;

³⁵ the descendants of Harim, 320;

³⁶ the men of Jericho, 345;

³⁷ the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 721;

³⁸ and the descendants of Senaah, 3,930.

³⁹ The priests:

the descendants of Jedaiah (through the house of Jeshua), 973;

⁴⁰ the descendants of Immer, 1,052;

⁴¹ the descendants of Pashhur, 1,247;

⁴² and the descendants of Harim, 1,017.

⁴³ The Levites:

the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel, through the line of Hodevah), 74.

⁴⁴ The singers:

the descendants of Asaph, 148.

⁴⁵ The gatekeepers:

the descendants of Shallum, the descendants of Ater, the descendants of Talmon, the descendants of Akkub, the descendants of Hatita, and the descendants of Shobai, 138 in all.

⁴⁶ The temple servants:

the descendants of Ziha, the descendants of Hasupha, the descendants of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷ the descendants of Keros, the descendants of Sia, the descendants of Padon, ⁴⁸ the descendants of Lebanah, the descendants of Hagabah, the descendants of Shalmal, ⁴⁹ the descendants of Hanan, the descendants of Giddel, the descendants of Gahar, ⁵⁰ the descendants of Reaiah,

■ NEH 7:4 [NOTE] A BIG, EMPTY CITY. The walls were up, but few people lived inside. Chapter 11 fixes that.

■ NEH 7:5 [HEART] God put it into Nehemiah's heart to gather the people and count the families.

■ NEH 7:6 [NOTE] THE SAME LIST. 7:6 to 7:3 repeats the list of Ezra 2, with small differences in names and numbers. Both totals are 42,360. See the 2:64 note in Ezra, p. 11.

the descendants of Rezin,
 the descendants of Nekoda,
⁵¹the descendants of Gazzam,
 the descendants of Uzza,
 the descendants of Paseah,
⁵²the descendants of Besai,
 the descendants of Meunim,
 the descendants of Nephushesim,
⁵³the descendants of Bakbuk,
 the descendants of Hakupha,
 the descendants of Harhur,
⁵⁴the descendants of Bazlith,
 the descendants of Mehida,
 the descendants of Harsha,
⁵⁵the descendants of Barkos,
 the descendants of Sisera,
 the descendants of Temah,
⁵⁶the descendants of Nezhiah,
 and the descendants of Hatipha.

⁵⁷The descendants of the servants of Solomon:

the descendants of Sotai,
 the descendants of Sophereth,
 the descendants of Perida,
⁵⁸the descendants of Jaala,
 the descendants of Darkon,
 the descendants of Giddel,
⁵⁹the descendants of Shephatiah,
 the descendants of Hattil,
 the descendants of Pochereth-hazze-
 baim,
 and the descendants of Amon.

⁶⁰The temple servants and descendants of the servants of Solomon numbered 392 in all.

⁶¹The following came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove that their families were descended from Israel:

⁶²the descendants of Delaiah,
 the descendants of Tobiah,
 and the descendants of Nekoda,
 642 in all.

⁶³And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah,
 the descendants of Hakkoz,
 and the descendants of Barzillai (who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name).

⁶⁴These men searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶⁵The governor ordered them not to eat the most holy things until there was a priest to consult the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶The whole assembly numbered 42,360, ⁶⁷in addition to their 7,337 menservants and maidservants, as well as their 245 male and female singers. ⁶⁸They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁹435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

OFFERINGS BY THE EXILES // EXODUS 38:21-31; EZRA 2:68-70

⁷⁰Some of the heads of the families contributed to the project. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold coins, 50 bowls, and 530 priestly garments. ⁷¹And some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the project 20,000 gold coins and 2,750 pounds of silver. ⁷²The rest of the people gave a total of 20,000 gold coins, 2,500 pounds of silver, and 67 priestly garments.

⁷³So the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, and temple servants, along with some of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns. And by the seventh month the Israelites had settled in their towns.

8

CHAPTER 8 IN 30 SECONDS

Everyone gathers by the Water Gate, and Ezra reads God's law from morning till noon while the Levites explain it. The people cry. Nehemiah says, Stop crying and throw a party, the joy of Yahweh is your strength. They camp out in booths for a week.

EZRA READS THE LAW // DEUTERONOMY 31:9-13

¹At that time all the people gathered together in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded for Israel.

■ **NEH 7:70 [FIELD NOTES]** See the Persian Gold Coins Field Notes page in Ezra, p. -.

■ **NEH 8:1 [NOTE]** EZRA IS BACK. Most date Ezra's coming to 458 BC, 13 years before Nehemiah, Ezra 7. Here the two men work together, 8:9. See the Big Question Ezra Reads the Law.

NOTABLE

² On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could listen and understand. ³ So Ezra read it aloud from daybreak until noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate, in front of the men and women and those who could understand.

And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for this occasion. At his right side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, and at his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

⁵ Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was standing above them all, and as he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God, and with their hands up-lifted, all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground.

⁷ The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law as they stood in their places. ⁸ So they read from the Book of the Law of God, explaining it and giving insight, so that the people could understand what was being read.

⁹ Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to Yahweh your God. Do not mourn or weep."

For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the Law.

¹⁰ Then Nehemiah told them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send out portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of Yahweh is your strength."

■ **NEH 8:10 [NOTABLE]** The people cried when they heard God's law. Nehemiah told them to throw a party and share it, because God's joy is what makes you strong.

¹¹ And the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, since today is holy. Do not grieve."

¹² Then all the people began to eat and drink, to send out portions, and to rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that had been made known to them.

THE BIG QUESTION

EZRA READS THE LAW

The Scene

NEHEMIAH 8:1 TO 18 · DEUTERONOMY 31:10 TO 13

THE SCENE

On the first day of the seventh month, in the fall of 445 BC, everyone gathered in the square by the Water Gate. Men, women and children old enough to understand stood from morning till noon while Ezra read, 8:1 to 3.

A WOODEN PLATFORM

Ezra stood on a high wooden stage with thirteen men beside him. When he opened the book, everyone stood up, 8:4 to 5. Many churches and synagogues still stand for the reading of Scripture.

THEY GAVE THE SENSE

The Levites read clearly and explained it so the people understood, 8:8. Jewish tradition in the Talmud says this means they also put it into Aramaic, the everyday language many spoke after Babylon.

WHY THEY WEPT

They heard God's law and saw how far they had fallen. Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites said, Do not weep. Nehemiah added, Do not grieve, for the joy of Yahweh is your strength, 8:9 to 10.

What It Means

LUKE 4:16 TO 21 · LUKE 24:27 · 2 TIMOTHY 4:2

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS

The next day they read about the feast where Israel lives in shelters for a week, Leviticus 23:39 to 43. Everyone built booths of branches on their roofs and in the squares, 8:14 to 17.

WHAT BOOK?

The Book of the Law of Moses, read every day of the feast, 8:18. Moses had said to read the law to everyone at this feast every seventh year, Deuteronomy

31:10 to 13. Most think it was the five books of Moses, or a large part of them.

THE FIRST SERMON?

Read the text, then explain it. Many see here the start of the way synagogues and churches teach. Jesus did the same in Nazareth, reading Isaiah and then explaining it, Luke 4:16 to 21.

FOR TODAY

God's word is meant to be understood, not just heard. Read it, ask what it means, and let it lead to joy, not only tears.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES // LEVITICUS 23:33-44; ZECHARIAH 14:16-21

¹³ On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Law.

¹⁴ And they found written in the Law, which Yahweh had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, ¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this message and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hill country and bring back branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written."

¹⁶ And the people went out, brought back branches, and made booths on their own rooftops, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God, and in the squares by the Water Gate and by the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The whole assembly that had returned from exile made booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated like this. And there was great rejoicing.

¹⁸ Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. The Israelites kept the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day they held an assembly, according to the ordinance.

■ **NEH 8:17 [NOTE]** NOT SINCE JOSHUA. Israel had kept the Feast of Booths before, 2 Chronicles 8:13 and Ezra 3:4. Many think the point is that it had never been kept like this, by everyone, with such joy.

9

CHAPTER 9 IN 30 SECONDS

A day of fasting and confession. The Levites pray the whole story of Israel, from creation to the exile: God was faithful every time, and the people were not. They end by saying, We are slaves in our own land.

THE PEOPLE CONFESS THEIR SINS

¹ On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth, with dust on their heads. ² Those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all the foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

³ While they stood in their places, they read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh their God for a quarter of the day, and they spent another quarter of the day in confession and worship of Yahweh their God.

⁴ And the Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani—stood on the raised platform and cried out in a loud voice to Yahweh their God. ⁵ Then the Levites—Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah—said, "Stand up and bless Yahweh your God from everlasting to everlasting:

Blessed be Your glorious name,
and may it be exalted
above all blessing and praise.

⁶ You alone are Yahweh.

You created the heavens,
the highest heavens with all their host,
the earth and all that is on it,
the seas and all that is in them.
You give life to all things,
and the host of heaven worships You.

⁷ You are Yahweh,
the God who chose Abram,
who brought him out of Ur of the
Chaldeans
and gave him the name Abraham.

■ **NEH 9:1 [NOTE]** THE PRAYER. 9:5 to 37 is one of the longest prayers in the Bible. It tells Israel's story from creation to the exile. It reports what God said and did, but quotes no words of God, so it stays black.

THE HEART DEMONIC

⁸ You found his heart faithful before You,
and made a covenant with him
to give the land of the Canaanites and Hit-
tites,
of the Amorites and Perizzites,
of the Jebusites and Girgashites—
to give it to his descendants.
You have kept Your promise,
because You are righteous.

⁹ You saw the affliction of our fathers in
Egypt;
You heard their cry at the Red Sea.
¹⁰ You performed signs and wonders
against Pharaoh,
all his officials, and all the people of his
land,
for You knew they had acted with arro-
gance
against our fathers.
You made a name for Yourself
that endures to this day.
¹¹ You divided the sea before them,
and they crossed through it on dry
ground.
You hurled their pursuers into the depths
like a stone into raging waters.
¹² You led them with a pillar of cloud by
day
and a pillar of fire by night,
to light for them the way
in which they should travel.
¹³ You came down on Mount Sinai
and spoke with them from heaven.
You gave them just ordinances, true laws,
and good statutes and commandments.
¹⁴ You revealed to them Your holy Sabbath
and gave them commandments and
statutes and laws
through Your servant Moses.
¹⁵ In their hunger You gave them bread
from heaven;
in their thirst You brought them water
from the rock.
You told them to go in and possess the
land
that You had sworn to give them.

¹⁶ But they and our fathers became arro-
gant and stiff-necked
and did not obey Your commandments.

¹⁷ They refused to listen and failed to re-
member
the wonders You performed among
them.

They stiffened their necks and appointed
a leader
to return them to their bondage in
Egypt.

But You are a forgiving God,
gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in loving devotion,
and You did not forsake them.

¹⁸ Even when they cast for themselves
an image of a calf and said,
'This is your God who brought you up out
of Egypt,'
and when they committed terrible blas-
phemies,

¹⁹ You in Your great compassion
did not forsake them in the wilderness.

By day the pillar of cloud never turned
away

from guiding them on their path;
and by the night the pillar of fire
illuminated the way they should go.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ For forty years You sustained them in
the wilderness,
so that they lacked nothing.

Their clothes did not wear out
and their feet did not swell.

²² You gave them kingdoms and peoples
and allotted to them every corner of the
land.

So they took the land of Sihon king of
Heshbon
and of Og king of Bashan.

²³ You multiplied their descendants
like the stars of heaven
and brought them to the land

■ NEH 9:7 [FIELD NOTES] See the Ur of the Chaldeans
Field Notes page in Genesis, p.~.

■ NEH 9:8 [HEART] God found Abraham's heart faithful
and made a covenant with him.

■ NEH 9:18 [DEMONIC] Israel casts a golden calf and calls
it God

You had told their fathers to enter and possess.

²⁴ So their descendants went in and possessed the land;

You subdued before them the Canaanites dwelling in the land.

You delivered into their hands the kings and peoples of the land, to do with them as they wished.

²⁵ They captured fortified cities and fertile land

and took houses full of all goods, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance.

So they ate and were filled; they grew fat and delighted in Your great goodness.

²⁶ But they were disobedient and rebelled against You;

they flung Your law behind their backs.

They killed Your prophets, who had admonished them to return to You.

They committed terrible blasphemies.

²⁷ So You delivered them into the hands of enemies who oppressed them, and in their time of distress they cried out to You.

From heaven You heard them, and in Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who saved them from the hands of their enemies.

²⁸ But as soon as they had rest, they again did evil in Your sight.

So You abandoned them to the hands of their enemies, who had dominion over them.

When they cried out to You again, You heard from heaven, and You delivered them many times in Your compassion.

²⁹ You admonished them to turn back to Your law,

but they were arrogant and disobeyed Your commandments.

They sinned against Your ordinances, by which a man will live if he practices them.

They turned a stubborn shoulder; they stiffened their necks and would not obey.

³⁰ You were patient with them for many years,

and Your Spirit admonished them through Your prophets.

Yet they would not listen, so You gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.

³¹ But in Your great compassion, You did not put an end to them; nor did You forsake them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God.

³² So now, our God, the great and mighty and awesome God who keeps His gracious covenant, do not view lightly all the hardship that has come upon us, and upon our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, our ancestors and all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today.

³³ You are just in all that has befallen us, because You have acted faithfully, while we have acted wickedly.

³⁴ Our kings and leaders and priests and fathers did not obey Your law or listen to Your commandments and warnings that You gave them.

³⁵ For even while they were in their kingdom, with the abundant goodness that You had given them, and in the spacious and fertile land that You had set before them, they would not serve You or turn from their wicked ways.

³⁶ So here we are today as slaves in the land You gave our fathers to enjoy its fruit and goodness—here we are as slaves!

³⁷ Its abundant harvest goes to the kings You have set over us because of our sins.

And they rule over our bodies and our livestock as they please.

We are in great distress.

³⁸ In view of all this, we make a binding agreement, putting it in writing and sealing it with the names of our leaders, Levites, and priests."

10

CHAPTER 10 IN 30 SECONDS

They sign a promise in writing. No marrying people who serve other gods, no shopping on the Sabbath, debts canceled every seventh year, and gifts to keep God's house running. We will not neglect the house of our God.

SIGNERS OF THE COVENANT

¹ Now these were the ones who sealed the document:

Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, and also Zedekiah,

² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,

³ Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah,

⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,

⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,

⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,

⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,

⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah.

These were the priests.

⁹ The Levites:

Jeshua son of Azaniah,

Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel,

¹⁰ and their associates: Shebaniah, Hodiah,

Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,

¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

¹² Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,

¹³ Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

¹⁴ And the leaders of the people:

Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani,

¹⁵ Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,

¹⁶ Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,

¹⁷ Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,

¹⁸ Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai,

¹⁹ Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,

²⁰ Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,

²¹ Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua,

²² Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,

²³ Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub,

²⁴ Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek,

²⁵ Rehun, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,

²⁶ Ahijah, Hanan, Anan,

²⁷ Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

THE VOWS OF THE COVENANT

²⁸ "The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, and all who had separated themselves from the people of the land to obey the Law of God—along with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand, ²⁹ hereby join with their noble brothers and commit themselves with a sworn oath to follow the Law of God given through His servant Moses and to obey carefully all the commandments, ordinances, and statutes of Yahweh our Lord.

³⁰ We will not give our daughters in marriage to the people of the land, and we will not take their daughters for our sons.

³¹ When the people of the land bring merchandise or any kind of grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we will not buy from them on a Sabbath or holy day. Every seventh year we will let the fields lie fallow and will cancel every debt.

³² We also place ourselves under the obligation to contribute an eighth of an ounce of silver yearly for the service of the house of our God: ³³ for the showbread, for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings, for the Sabbath offerings, for the New Moons and appointed feasts, for the holy offerings, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the duties of the house of our God.

³⁴ We have cast lots among the priests, Levites, and people for the donation of wood by our families at the appointed times each year. They are to bring it to the house of our God to burn on the altar of Yahweh our God, as it is written in the Law.

³⁵ We will also bring the firstfruits of our land and of every fruit tree to the house of Yahweh year by year. ³⁶ And we will bring the firstborn of our sons and our livestock, as it is written in the Law, and will

■ **NEH 10:1 [NOTE] SIGNED AND SEALED.** The leaders put their seals on a written promise, 9:38. Nehemiah signs first.

■ **NEH 10:34 [NOTE] THE WOOD OFFERING.** The altar fire must never go out, Leviticus 6:13. Families took turns bringing the wood.

bring the firstborn of our herds and flocks to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God.

³⁷ Moreover, we will bring to the priests at the storerooms of the house of our God the firstfruits of our dough, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees, and of our new wine and oil. A tenth of our produce belongs to the Levites, so that they shall receive tithes in all the towns where we labor. ³⁸ A priest of Aaron's line is to accompany the Levites when they collect the tenth, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of these tithes to the storerooms of the treasury in the house of our God. ³⁹ For the Israelites and the Levites are to bring the contributions of grain, new wine, and oil to the storerooms where the articles of the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers stay.

Thus we will not neglect the house of our God."

11

CHAPTER 11 IN 30 SECONDS

Jerusalem needs people, so they cast lots, and one family in ten moves into the city. The chapter lists who lived in Jerusalem and who lived in the towns around it.

JERUSALEM'S NEW SETTLERS

¹ Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in the holy city of Jerusalem, while the remaining nine were to dwell in their own towns.

² And the people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³ These are the heads of the provinces who settled in Jerusalem. (In the villages of Judah, however, each lived on his own property in their towns—the Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants, and descendants of Solomon's servants—⁴ while some of the descendants of Judah and Benjamin settled 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; ⁵ and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. ⁶ The descendants of Perez who settled in Jerusalem totaled 468 men of valor.

⁷ From the descendants of Benjamin:

Sallu son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah; ⁸ and his followers Gabbai and Sallai—928 men. ⁹ Joel son of Zichri was the officer over them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was over the Second District of the city.

¹⁰ From the priests:

Jedaiah son of Joiarib; Jachin; ¹¹ Seraiah son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the chief official of the house of God; ¹² and their associates who did the work at 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 Malchijah; ¹³ and his associates, the leaders of families—242 men;

Amashai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer; ¹⁴ and his associates—128 mighty men of valor. Zabdiel son of Haggadolim was their overseer.

¹⁵ From the Levites:

Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; ¹⁶ Shabbethai and Jozabad, two leaders of the Levites, who supervised the work outside the house of God; ¹⁷ Matthanah son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸ The Levites in the holy city totaled 284.

¹⁹ And the gatekeepers:

■ NEH 11:1 [NOTE] ONE IN TEN. They cast lots, and one family in ten moved into Jerusalem. The people blessed those who volunteered, 11:2.

BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

Akkub, Talmon, and their associates, who kept watch at the gates—172 men.

RESIDENTS OUTSIDE JERUSALEM

²⁰ The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the villages of Judah, each on his own inheritance. ²¹ The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, with Ziha and Gishpa over them.

²² Now the overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. He was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the singers in charge of the service of the house of God.

²³ For there was a command from the king concerning the singers, an ordinance regulating their daily activities. ²⁴ Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, a descendant of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in every matter concerning the people.

²⁵ As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba, Dibon, Jekabzeel, and their villages;

²⁶ in Jeshua, Moladah, and Beth-pelet; ²⁷ in Hazar-shual; in Beersheba and its villages; ²⁸ in Ziklag; in Meconah and its villages; ²⁹ in En-rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, ³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages; in Lachish and its fields; and in Azekah and its villages. So they settled from Beersheba all the way to the Valley of Hinnom.

³¹ The descendants of Benjamin from Geba lived in Michmash, Aija, and Bethel with its villages; ³² in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵ Lod, and Ono; and in the Valley of the Craftsmen.

³⁶ And some divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.

12

CHAPTER 12 IN 30 SECONDS

Lists of priests and Levites, and then a giant party. Two huge choirs march on top of the wall in opposite directions and meet at the temple. The noise of the celebration is heard far away.

THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES WHO RETURNED

¹ Now these are the priests and Levites who went up with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Jeshua:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,

³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,

⁴ Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah,

⁵ Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,

⁶ Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah,

⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah.

These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Jeshua.

⁸ The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who, with his associates, led the songs of thanksgiving. ⁹ Bakbukiah and Unni, their associates, stood across from them in the services.

¹⁰ Jeshua was the father of Joiakim,

Joiakim was the father of Eliashib,

Eliashib was the father of Joiada,

¹¹ Joiada was the father of Jonathan,

and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

¹² In the days of Joiakim, these were the heads of the priestly families:

of the family of Seraiah, Meraiah;

of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

¹³ of Ezra, Meshullam;

of Amariah, Jehohanan;

¹⁴ of Malluchi, Jonathan;

of Shebaniah, Joseph;

¹⁵ of Harim, Adna;

of Meraioth, Helkai;

¹⁶ of Iddo, Zechariah;

of Ginnethon, Meshullam;

¹⁷ of Abijah, Zichri;

of Miniamin and of Moadiah, Piltai;

¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua;

of Shemaiah, Jonathan;

¹⁹ of Joiarib, Mattenai;

of Jedaiah, Uzzi;

²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai;

of Amok, Eber;

²¹ of Hilkiah, Hashabiah;

and of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

■ NEH 12:1 [NOTE] ZERUBBABEL. The leader of the first return, about 90 years earlier. He is in Jesus' family line, Matthew 1:12 to 13, so his name is underlined.

ARCHAEOLOGY BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

22 In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, during the reign of Darius the Persian, the heads of the families of the Levites and priests were recorded.

23 As for the descendants of Levi, the family heads up to the days of Johanan son of Eliashib were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles. **24** The leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel, along with their associates, who stood across from them to give praise and thanksgiving as one section alternated with the other, as prescribed by David the man of God.

25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates. **26** They served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe.

THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL

27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from all their homes and brought to Jerusalem to celebrate the joyous dedication with thanksgiving and singing, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres.

28 The singers were also assembled from the region around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, **29** from Bethgilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth, for they had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. **30** After the priests and Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

31 Then I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and I appointed two great thanksgiving choirs. One was to proceed along the top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. **32** Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed, **33** along

with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, **34** Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, **35** and some of the priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, **36** and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani—with the musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession. **37** At the Fountain Gate they went directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east.

38 The second thanksgiving choir proceeded to the left, and I followed it with half the people along the top of the wall, past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, **39** 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. And they stopped at the Gate of the Guard.

40 The two thanksgiving choirs then stood in the house of God, as did I, along with the half of the officials accompanying me,

41 as well as the priests with their trumpets—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah— **42** and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. Then the choirs sang out under the direction of Jezrahiah.

43 On that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

PROVISIONS FOR TEMPLE WORSHIP

44 And on that same day men were appointed over the rooms that housed the supplies, contributions, firstfruits, and tithes. The portions specified by the Law for the priests and Levites were gathered into these storerooms from the fields of

■ NEH 12:22 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Elephantine Papyri
 ■ NEH 12:22 [ARCHAEOLOGY] Darius II of Persia is named in his own records, and Elephantine papyri are dated by his years, see The Elephantine Papyri Field Notes page.
 ■ NEH 12:22 [NOTE] DARIUS THE PERSIAN. Most think this is Darius II, 423 to 404 BC. A letter from 407 BC names Johanan as high priest. See The Elephantine Papyri Field Notes page. Josephus says Jaddua was high priest when Alexander the Great came, 332 BC, so some think this is Darius III.

■ NEH 12:31 [NOTE] TWO CHOIRS. One choir marched to the right and one to the left, on top of the wall, and they met at the temple.

BLOODLINE OF CHRIST

the villages, because Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who were serving.

⁴⁵ They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, along with the singers and gatekeepers, as David and his son Solomon had prescribed. ⁴⁶

For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there were directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

⁴⁷ So in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside daily portions for the Levites, and the Levites set aside daily portions for the descendants of Aaron.

13

CHAPTER 13 IN 30 SECONDS

Nehemiah goes back to the king for a while. When he returns, it is a mess. Tobiah lives in a temple storeroom, the Levites are not paid, people sell on the Sabbath, and men have married women who serve other gods. Nehemiah throws out Tobiah's furniture, locks the gates and even pulls out some hair. Remember me, O my God.

FOREIGNERS EXCLUDED

¹ At that time the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people, and in it they found the passage stating that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, ² because they had not met the Israelites with food and water, but had hired Balaam to call down a curse against them (although our God had turned the curse into a blessing).

³ As soon as the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all of foreign descent.

THE TEMPLE CLEANSED

⁴ Now before this, Eliashib the priest, a relative of Tobiah, had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God ⁵ and had prepared for Tobiah a large room where they had previously stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the tem-

ple articles, and the tithes of grain, new wine, and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, along with the contributions for the priests.

⁶ While all this was happening, I was not in Jerusalem, because I had returned to Artaxerxes king of Babylon in the thirty-second year of his reign. Some time later I obtained leave from the king ⁷ to return to Jerusalem. Then I discovered the evil that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah by providing him a room in the courts of the house of God.

⁸ And I was greatly displeased and threw all of Tobiah's household goods out of the room. ⁹ Then I ordered that the rooms be purified, and I had the articles of the house of God restored to them, along with the grain offerings and frankincense.

TITHES RESTORED // LEVITICUS 27:30–34;

DEUTERONOMY 14:22–29; DEUTERONOMY 26:1–15

¹⁰ I also learned that because the portions for the Levites had not been given to them, all the Levites and singers responsible for performing the service had gone back to their own fields. ¹¹ So I rebuked the officials and asked, "Why has the house of God been neglected?"

Then I gathered the Levites and singers together and stationed them at their posts, ¹² and all Judah brought a tenth of the grain, new wine, and oil into the storerooms. ¹³ I appointed as treasurers over the storerooms Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, with Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, to assist them, because they were considered trustworthy. They were responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites.

¹⁴ Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my deeds of loving devotion for the house of my God and for its services.

THE SABBATH RESTORED // JEREMIAH 17:19–27

¹⁵ In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and

■ **NEH 13:1 [NOTE] THE LAW READ.** Deuteronomy 23:3 to 6. The verse reports what the book says but does not quote God, so it stays black. Ruth was a Moabite who joined Israel's God; see A Moabite in Jesus' Family? in Ruth, p. 1.

■ **NEH 13:2 [NOTE] BALAAM.** See Balaam in Numbers, p. 1.

■ **NEH 13:6 [NOTE] BACK TO THE KING.** The 32nd year of Artaxerxes was 433 BC. How long Nehemiah was gone is not said.

bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, along with wine, grapes, and figs. All kinds of goods were being brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I warned them against selling food on that day. ¹⁶ Additionally, men of Tyre who lived there were importing fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Then I rebuked the nobles of Judah and asked, "What is this evil you are doing—profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did not your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this disaster on us and on this city? And now you are rekindling His wrath against Israel by profaning the Sabbath!"

¹⁹ When the evening shadows began to fall on the gates of Jerusalem, just before the Sabbath, I ordered that the gates be shut and not opened until after the Sabbath. I posted some of my servants at the gates so that no load could enter on the Sabbath day.

²⁰ Once or twice, the merchants and those who sell all kinds of goods camped outside Jerusalem, ²¹ but I warned them, "Why are you camping in front of the wall? If you do it again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on, they did not return on the Sabbath. ²² Then I instructed the Levites to purify themselves and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this as well, O my God, and show me mercy according to Your abundant loving devotion.

INTERMARRIAGE FORBIDDEN // EZRA 9:1–4

²³ In those days I also saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or of the other peoples, but could not speak the language of Judah. ²⁵ I rebuked them and called down curses on them. I beat some of these men and pulled out their hair.

Then I made them take an oath before God and said, "You must not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters as wives for your sons or for yourselves! ²⁶ Did not King Solomon of Israel sin in matters like this? There was not a king like him among many nations, and he was loved by his God, who made him king over all Israel—yet foreign women drew him into sin. ²⁷ Must we now hear that you too are doing all this terrible evil and acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?"

²⁸ Even one of the sons of Jehoiada son of Eliashib the high priest had become a son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I drove him away from me.

²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.

³⁰ Thus I purified the priests and Levites from everything foreign, and I assigned specific duties to each of the priests and Levites. ³¹ I also arranged for contributions of wood at the appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, with favor.

■ **NEH 13:23 [NOTE] THE FOREIGN WIVES AGAIN.** Ezra faced the same problem almost 30 years earlier. See *The Foreign Wives* in Ezra, p. 1, and the Big Question Why Pull Out Their Hair?

■ **NEH 13:26 [NOTE] SOLOMON.** See *Solomon's Wisdom and 700 Wives* in 1 Kings, p. 1.

■ **NEH 13:28 [NOTE] SANBALLAT'S SON IN LAW.** Josephus tells of a priest named Manasseh who married Sanballat's daughter and became priest of the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. He puts it about 100 years later. Some think he mixed up two stories. Others think there was a later Sanballat, since old papyrus name more than one.

■ **NEH 13:31 [NOTE] REMEMBER ME.** Nehemiah ends his book the way he prayed all through it, 5:19, 13:14 and 13:22.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

WHY PULL OUT THEIR HAIR?*What Happened*

NEHEMIAH 13:23 TO 27 · EZRA 9:3 · DEUTERONOMY 25:1 TO 3

WHAT HAPPENED

Men of Judah had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab, and half their children could not even speak the language of Judah, 13:23 to 24. Nehemiah says, I rebuked them, cursed them, beat some of them and pulled out their hair, 13:25.

A PUBLIC SHAME

Shaving or pulling out a man's beard shamed him in front of everyone, 2 Samuel 10:4 to 5 and Isaiah 50:6.

EZRA DID IT TOO, KIND OF

Almost 30 years earlier Ezra pulled out his OWN hair when he heard the same news, Ezra 9:3. Nehemiah pulled out theirs.

THE POINT

Then he made them swear not to do it again, and he reminded them of Solomon, whom foreign wives led to other gods, 13:25 to 27.

tians 6:1, and to correct with kindness, 2 Timothy 2:24 to 25. See also The Foreign Wives in Ezra, p. 27.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Nehemiah cared about God's people more than about being liked.

Every View

EZRA 7:26 · GALATIANS 6:1 · 2 TIMOTHY 2:24 TO 25

VIEW 1: A GOVERNOR DOING HIS JOB

Nehemiah was the king's governor and judge. The law allowed a judge to have a guilty man beaten, Deuteronomy 25:1 to 3, and the Persian king had given Ezra power to punish people who broke God's law, Ezra 7:26. He was saving a tiny people from losing its faith.

VIEW 2: RIGHT CAUSE, TOO FAR

Others say he was right about the danger but too rough. Ezra wept and prayed; Nehemiah hit. The Bible reports what he did without always saying it was right.

VIEW 3: AN HONEST DIARY

Many love this book because Nehemiah does not clean himself up. He tells it as it happened, temper and all, and asks God to remember him, 13:31.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS?

Nobody gets beaten in church. Paul says to restore someone gently, Gala-