

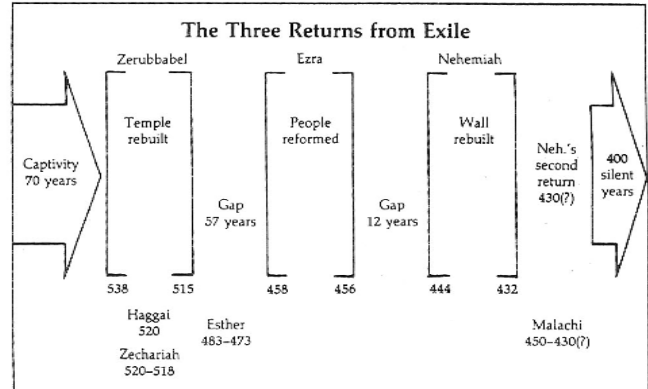
Nehemiah 1

Introduction

Nehemiah is the last historical book. In the Old Testament. The temple has been rebuilt, but after carefully reading Nehemiah, the city itself is still in ruins. The walls and gates are still only rubble. There are some differences of opinion on the dates, but the divergence is only 10 - 15 years. It is evident from both charts that Malachi is working in the same time period as Ezra and Nehemiah, but they do not mention each other so the relationship is not revealed. But we can get a clear picture of the spirituality of the people

Ezra / Nehemiah Timeline

	PERSIAN KING	DATES	BIBLICAL CORRELATION	Time Line
Chap 1 – 4:6,24	CYRUS	539-530	Return of Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1-3) Temple work begins	538 536
	CAMBYSES	530-522	Rebuilding at Jerusalem stopped (Ezra 4)	530
Chap 5 - 6	DARIUS I	522-486	Haggai and Zechariah prophesy Temple Completed (Ezra 5-6)	520 516
Chap 4:7-23 Chap 7 - 10	XERXES	486-464	Story of Esther (Esther 1-9)	
	ARTAXERXES I	464-423	Return of Ezra (Ezra 7-10) Return of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-2) Prophecy of Malachi	458 445 443



by comparing the lives of these three men.

The historical setting of the book places it in the heart of the reign of Artaxerxes 1, which spanned a period of about forty years. Ezra leaves for Jerusalem in the seventh year of his reign. Judging from the comments in Ezra, not only the king but the entire court was aware of Ezra and his mission and wanted him to restore the temple worship. It in the twentieth year of his reign and only thirteen to fourteen years later that Nehemiah appears sad in the presence of the king and is commissioned to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. Both Ezra (*you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people*) and Nehemiah (*I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah*) are given secular authority from the king to do their work. Ezra went “*in the seventh year of the king*” and Nehemiah “*from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years.*”

*1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, ... 6 and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given. **The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him.** ... 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem **in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.** ... 10 Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. ... 11 **This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave Ezra the priest, the scribe, expert in the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of His statutes to Israel:** ... 12 **Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, a scribe of the Law of the God of heaven:** ... 13 **I issue a decree that all those of the people of Israel and the priests and Levites in my realm, who volunteer to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you.** 14 And whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, with regard to the Law of your God which is in your hand; ... 25 And **you, Ezra, according to your God-given wisdom, set magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are in the region beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach those who do not know them.** 26 **Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.** Ezra 7:1-26*

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor

my brothers ate the governor's provisions. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work. 17 And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Neh. 5:14-18

No mention is made of Ezra when Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem until after the wall is finished then he appears as a priest and scribe, but it appears his political power was no longer a part of his life. We only have this one event where they worked together.

1 they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women ... 9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, Neh.8:1-9

Nehemiah leaves Jerusalem after the twelve years that were allotted to him, but returned again some time later. He still had the authority to command in Jerusalem, but we are not told whether he was still working as the governor.

But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem Neh. 13:6-7

News From Jerusalem

Some affirm from these words that Nehemiah was the writer of the book. Since Ezra was there and he was a scribe and likely writer of Ezra, some affirm that he was the writer. Some actually have called Nehemiah the Second Book of Ezra.

Chislev ... A proper noun denoting the month Chislev or Kislev. It is the name given to the ninth month of the year, equal to our November/December (Neh 1:1; Zech 7:1). (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: OT:3691)

In this ninth month of their year Nehemiah is the cup bearer of the king and has spent his life working and living in Shushan. Esther also spent most of her life in this city (Esth. 2:5) as it was the capital city of the Medo Persian empire. Since the cup bearer had the life of the king in his hands as poison was the method choice to kill the king, Nehemiah is in a very important position as a servant of the king.

Some men returning from a trip to Judah meet with Nehemiah and after asking about their welfare, he hears the terrible news. In spite of God bringing them back to their land and giving them the opportunity to restore the temple and city, they have not done so. After over a hundred years, they have not been motivated to do the most obvious thing to protect their security. The walls Nebuchadnezzar broke down are still rubble and all the gates are still burned with fire. The fact that Nehemiah was able to finish it in 52 days, (Neh. 6:15) is a powerful indictment against them. If there had been someone who wanted to finish that wall, it could have been done. Yet while it is an indictment against them it is a powerful testimony to the zeal, faith, and determination of Nehemiah.

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." Neh 1:1-3

Nehemiah's devotion to God and to His people are clearly revealed both in his response and in his prayer to God. He did not feel bad for a moment and then concluding there was nothing more he could do he moved on with his life. His initial response was to mourn and weep. But many days later he was still mourning and weeping. He was not the only one who had felt this way.

Even a Psalm had been written about it, while they were in Babylonian captivity.

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion ... 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget its skill! 6 If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth — If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy. Ps. 137:1-5

Nehemiah's Prayer

Throughout these “*many days*,” Nehemiah was fasting to enhance the power of his prayers so that God would hear him.

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. Neh. 1:4

The address and contents were dedicated to having God intervene in behalf of the children of Israel and to help them to rebuild the gates and become established. He began by praising God's character and promises. God had Himself proclaimed these things. He is faithful to His covenant and He does keep mercy from generation to generation on those who love Him and keep His commands. Nehemiah uses this part of God's character as the basis for his plea. He also quotes Solomon's promise that God would be attentive and His eyes open to all who pray toward the temple in Jerusalem.

He reasons with God using some of the Scriptures penned by Moses concerning the very events that they had witnessed and were still in the midst of. He confesses the sins of the people and his own sins. He recognizes as we all should that we too bear a part in the judgments God has passed on His people for their sins. Not only have the fathers sinned but so have we and so had Nehemiah. All of us have acted very corruptly against Him and have not kept all the commands, statutes and ordinances. While their violations were from the Law given by Moses, our are from our violation of the teachings of the Christ.

*5 And I said: “I pray, Lord God of heaven, **O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments,** 6 please **let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant** which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and **confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You.** Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 **We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded** Your servant Moses. Neh. 1:5-7*

The intent of the prayer is given in 1:9-10. The unfaithfulness is what had led to the scattering, but now there were some who were faithful to God and He had promised to bring them back to Jerusalem. That is what Nehemiah wants to do. He wants his faithfulness to lead God to bring him to Jerusalem where he can put all his efforts into rebuilding the walls.

*8 Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, **‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.’** 10 Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. Neh. 1:8-10*

Finally Nehemiah speaks of what he personally would like God to do for him based on all the above. He, along with others have been praying that Nehemiah will be allowed to return to Jerusalem. All of this centered on one thing: The same thing that had been given to Ezra by this same king some thirteen to fourteen years ago. He wants to receive mercy from the king that would lead to His being allowed to do the work. This is the same prayer that Esther had asked all in Shushan to pray and fast to God for. Since he was the king's cupbearer much of the prayer was already fulfilled. All he needed was the means to gain mercy from this king.

*11 **O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day,***

I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer. Neh. 1:11

Four Months Later: the Request to the King

Since the month of Nisan is the first month of the year, it has been about four months since he has heard the news and begun praying and fasting.

niysn: A proper noun referring to the month Nisan. It refers to Nisan, the first month of the Old Testament year. It was equal to our March/April period of time (Neh 2:1; Est 3:7), (Complete Word Study Dictionary: OT: OT:5212)

The providential manner in which God brought about the answer to this prayer is now described. The very emotions that were leading to the prayers brought Nehemiah to the attention of the king while he was performing his duties. Always of a cheerful disposition, now the marks of sadness on his face lead the king to ask him what is troubling him.

*And it came to pass **in the month of Nisan**, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that **I took the wine and gave it to the king**. Now I had never been sad in his presence before. 2 Therefore the king said to me, **“Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.”** Neh. 2:1-2*

The fear may have been for some other reason, but most likely it is the fear of having something important to ask, and when the moment arrives when it will be yes or no, we generally fear great fear since the moment of truth has arrived. He is very specific about his concerns. While Ezra had spoken for the temple, Nehemiah speaks of the condition of the city without walls and gates. The temple is there, but the city itself is still full of rubble and defenseless.

The king perceives in this statement a request that has not yet been worded, so he asks him directly exactly what he would like to do about it. He quickly explained that what he would dearly seek to do is to go to Jerusalem and rebuild it.

***So I became dreadfully afraid**, 3 and said to the king, **“May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”** 4 Then the king said to me, **“What do you request?”** **So I prayed to the God of heaven**. 5 And I said to 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 of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”** Neh. 2:2-5*

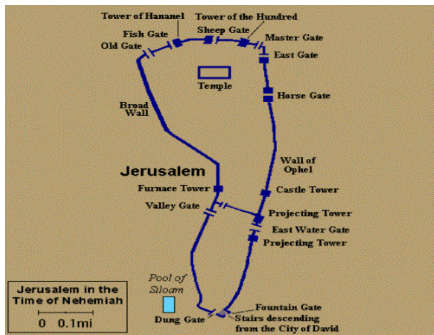
It is obvious to Nehemiah with these words that the request has been granted and only the means to accomplish are now being discussed. Since Nehemiah is actually gone for twelve years, it is very possible that this was the answer he gave to the king. Once this had been agreed, Nehemiah makes a second request for letters to give him safe passage to Judah, and a letter to the man who would be able to give him the timber he needed to set the gates of the temple, the walls of the city and the home he would occupy (probably the house Solomon had built for himself as he was building the temple. The king did everything he asked and Nehemiah gives God the glory.

*Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), **“How long will your journey be? And when will you return?”** So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. 7 Furthermore I said to the king, **“If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah,** 8 **and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy.”** And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me. Neh. 2:6-8*

Nehemiah 2

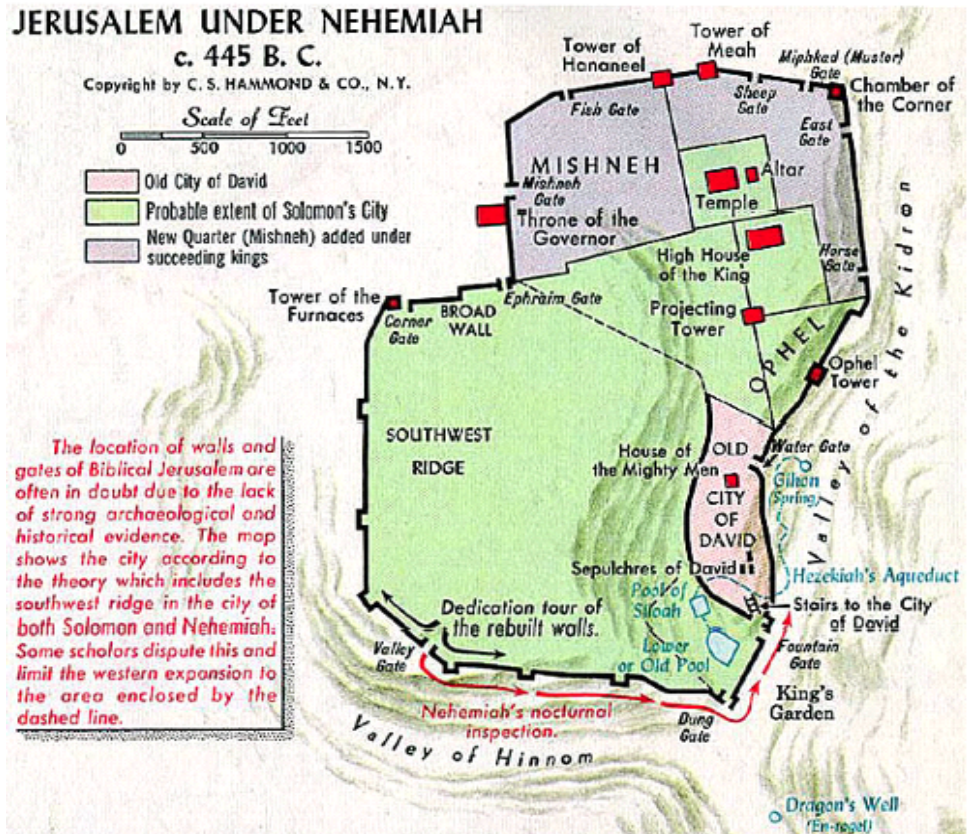
Introduction

Nehemiah Arrives in



Jerusalem

The first thing Nehemiah does as he travels to Jerusalem is to stop and speak with all the governors on the other side of the Euphrates river who might have any influence on what he was about to do. It appears he was well aware of the problems he would face as Zerubbabel and Joshua had faced similar issues with the Samaritans and other nations who stopped the rebuilding the temple. It was Nehemiah's intent to get all his defenses in order and then build the wall before serious opposition could be organized.



The location of walls and gates of Biblical Jerusalem are often in doubt due to the lack of strong archaeological and historical evidence. The map shows the city according to the theory which includes the southwest ridge in the city of both Solomon and Nehemiah. Some scholars dispute this and limit the western expansion to the area enclosed by the dashed line.

His concerns were reasonable as the opposition arises the moment those who were opposed heard that he was there. The enemies he would contend with are “Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official” Sanballat is considered by some to be a resident of Beth-horon and thus a Samaritan from the area of Ephraim, but others consider him to be from Horonaim, a town in Moab and thus a Moabite. These men were “deeply disturbed” (*grieved them exceedingly - ASV; very displeasing - NAS*). They had the upper hand and alliances in Jerusalem and thought it would remain in their power and they would keep the Jews from prospering.

Then I went to the governors in the region beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. 10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel. Neh. 2:9-10

When Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he does not do what he did with the governors along the way. He keeps his plans and ideas to himself. He came to Jerusalem and for three days told no one what he had come to do. God had put it in his heart through the Scriptures just as He does today. He goes out in the night and looked at the damage the walls had sustained and made an assessment of the work. It is specifically stated that he did not tell anyone what he had in mind.

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode. 13 And I went out by night through the Valley Gate to the Serpent Well and the Refuse Gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken

down and its gates which were burned with fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal under me to pass. 15 So I went up in the night by the valley, and viewed the wall; then I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work. Neh. 2:11-16

Once he had made his plans, he encouraged the Jews to build the walls and remove the reproach and weakness it implied. To motivate them, he first told them of God's providence and how God's hand had brought about his presence there. He then described the words and the letter that the king had given to him and the permission he had from the governors and from the nearby forests where they would get the timbers necessary. With no obstacles to doing the work, they were enthusiastic in their desire to rise up and build. Then they fulfilled their words by setting their hands to do the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach." 18 And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to this good work. Neh. 2:17-18

Another man joins in the chorus of Sanballat and Tobiah named "Geshem the Arab." They open their attack and reveal their opposition by mocking, scorning and laughing at the prospect of their being able to build these walls. Their obvious intent was to destroy the motivation and through discouragement force the Jews to stop working of their own accord.

They also throw in the hint that this is rebellion against the king, a threat Nehemiah had already inoculated them against this by showing that the king had already agreed that the walls and gates should be rebuilt. Nehemiah himself answered these taunts by reminding both the men who were opposed but more importantly the Jews who would do the work that they were relying on God to prosper and bring this about.

He concluded by telling them that they have no heritage, right or memorial in Jerusalem. They were not of the seed of Abraham and had no part in the covenants or promises. They could not stop the work and there would be no benefit to them when it was completed.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they laughed at us and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?" 20 So I answered them, and said to them, "The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem." Neh. 2:19-20

Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem

The third chapter details how the walls were rebuilt through the voluntary efforts of the people. The chapter lists each individual who volunteered and the section of the wall they chose to rebuild. Most agreed to build the wall from one gate to another, while others took on the task of building the gates. One man took the responsibility of rebuilding a gate and also 1000 cubits (1500 feet) of the walls.

*Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and **built the Sheep Gate**; they **consecrated it and hung its doors**. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. ... 13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah **repaired the Valley Gate**. **They built it, hung its doors with its bolts and bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Refuse Gate.** Neh. 3:3-32*

Not only did they rebuild, but at the end of the account we learn that many also donated money to further the work. Nehemiah led the way with 1000 gold drachma's, while the entire rest of the Jews gave 40,000.

*And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. **The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments.** 71 **Some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas.** 72 **And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.** Neh 7:70-72*

The Opposition of God's Enemies

The failure of the threats led to great anger. Their Second step in opposing was to mock and scorn their efforts in an attempt to discourage the people.

*But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "**What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish — stones that are burned?**" 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "**Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall.**" Neh. 4:1-3*

Nehemiah responds by praying to God asking that the abuse they are heaping upon them will ultimately fall upon themselves (Reap what you sow; Vengeance is mine). He knows God wants these walls to be rebuilt and realizes that by mocking them they were provoking God to anger. It is probably that this prayer was known to the people and motivated them. After his prayers, the zeal of the people who had a mind to work led to the walls quickly growing taller until they are halfway built.

***Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! 5 Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders. 6 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.** Neh. 4:4-6*

This time the number of persecutors has grown. It now included not only Sanballat and Tobiah, but also the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites are all very angry at this turn of events. This was not a threat but a conspiracy. The plans were laid to secretly come and attack them while they are working in order to create confusion and stop the work.

After they heard about the conspiracy, once again Nehemiah and the other workers begin to pray that God would protect them. They also set up watchmen to keep an eye and ear open to their attack in order to warn the people of their approach.

But the mocking and threats are beginning to have an affect. We have moved from "the people have a mind to work" to "the strength of the laborers is failing." Whereas before they had ignored

the obstacles, not they begin to complain about the rubble and trash that was making the work more onerous. This is the affect of the increased pressure of the persecution. They are beginning to waver.

7 Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, 8 and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. 10 Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." Neh. 4:7-10

Added to the above fear and loss of zeal, were the continual mental attacks created by these warnings, seeking to fan the flames of fear and get the work to stop. They are creating rumors that it will be a sneak attack and they won't even know what hit them. These rumors were told and retold, added too and seeking to increase the pressure. They threaten to ambush and kill those who are building the wall.

And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." 12 So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us." Neh. 4:7-10

Nehemiah responded with a guard at the opening of the wall. He also asked the people to bring their swords, spears and bows in preparation for any attack. Nehemiah also continued to encourage them with a reminder of how Great and Awesome the Lord has shown Himself to be so many times in the past. He only needs them to have the faith to fight. He also exhorts them to fight for their brethren, sons, daughters, wives and houses. They had a lot to lose if they quit the work. So he encouraged them to fight.

13 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Neh. 4:13-14

Two things happened that gave the people the courage to rise above all this persecution. First they knew that the enemies had learned that their plot had been discovered and thus secrecy was no longer available to them. They also realized that God had brought this plot to nothing. This was all it took to get the people back to work. But now they were cautious and the work would go more slowly. steps taken to deal with it. This led to them giving up their plan. But although the people return to the work, they changed their strategy. Now half work and half hold a sword in preparation for any attack.

And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. 16 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. 18 Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. Neh. 4:15-18

Nehemiah also took another step. He brought the one who would blow the trumpet right next to him. He warned all the people that if they heard that trumpet, they needed to stop the work and rush to the place where they had heard the trumpet sound. He also encouraged them that God would fight for them.

And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. 19 Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." Neh. 4:18-20

This was enough to allay the fears. But prudence demanded that other steps be taken. The threat was real and the anxiety of the people needed to be removed. So while the labor continued Nehemiah had half the men who had been working on the wall to hold spears from dawn to dusk. Then when night came, he commanded that everyone stay in Jerusalem in preparation for an attack. From that point onward everyone kept their clothes on except when washing. This sign of strength would lead to the enemies realizing that any attack would not be easy and there would be heavy casualties.

So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." 23 So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing. Neh. 4:21-23

Internal Problems also Threatened the Project

As the time staying in Jerusalem continued to lengthen two things occurred. Some of the poor began to run out of money to buy food. Instead of bringing the problem to Nehemiah to solve as the governor to resolve for them, they do what they had done ever since they left Egypt. They began to murmur. They are growing hungry and have no means to get any. Thus the work is threatened by their hunger and discontent. They want grain to eat and to live.

*And there was a **great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.** 2 For there were those who said, **“We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.”** Neh 5:1*

They give reasons for their murmuring and complaining.

They then justify themselves by giving the reasons why they have no grain.

1. We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, to buy grain because of the famine.
2. We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.
3. We are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves
4. Some of our daughters have been brought into slavery.
5. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.

Some of these accusation are clear violations of the law and the leaders and rich who have done it are in sin. Other accusations are groundless since they are clearly justified under the law. But though lawful, they are not expedient.

*There were **also** some who said, **“We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.”** 4 There were **also** those who said, **“We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards.** 5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.” Neh 5:1-*

Some were violations others were not

A poor man had the right to sell himself in order to pay his debts and the wealthy had the right to purchase them. But they had no right to make them slaves. Instead they were to treat them as hired servants, which they were not doing. Also they had no right to sell them into slavery either to themselves or to other nations.

*‘And if one of your brethren who dwells by you **becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.** 40 As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. 41 And then he shall depart from you — he and his children with him — and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. 42 For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; **they shall not be sold as slaves.** 43 **You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God.** Lev. 25:39-43*

This was a sin that Ezekiel had warned them against while in Babylonian captivity.

*If he has **oppressed the poor and needy**, Robbed by violence, Not restored the pledge, Lifted his eyes to the idols, Or committed abomination; 13 If he has **exactd usury** Or taken increase — Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, He shall surely die; His blood shall be upon him. Ezek 18:12-13*

Yet they did have the right to take his field in sale and keep it until the year of Jubilee unless he has the power to redeem it. Even here though, the leaders had not quite kept the precept by keeping them from redeeming it because of the poverty with which they had returned from captivity.

***‘If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and ... if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, 27 then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. 28 But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession.** Lev. 25:25-28*

Nehemiah's Anger and Rebuke

While Nehemiah became very angry at this problem, he had to take some time to work through it

all. Murmuring and complaining are never the best way to deal with any problem. It is probable that his anger took in both the murmurers and those who had mistreated them.

He decided not to deal with those who were murmuring. The fact that they had charged usury and were oppressing the people was enough to charge them with a serious crime.

And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. 7 After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother."

Neh. 5:6-7

Their sins: Usury and Selling the Poor into Slavery

The law allowed them to loan money and expect repayment. But it did not allow usury and preferred that he be helped.

If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. 36 Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. 37 You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. 38 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. Lev. 25:35-38

"You shall not charge interest to your brother — interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the Lord your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess. Deut. 23:19-20

In spite these clear laws against it, these people were guilty and thus rightly condemned.

Those Redeemed Captives from Babylon should not be Enslaved by their own People

Added to this was selling these people which was also a clear violation of the Law of Moses as we saw above. At this point Nehemiah calls an great assembly to condemn them. He reminds them that they had been forced to pay money to redeem these people to bring them back from the slavery of the Babylonian captivity. If they had gone to such trouble to get these people redeemed so they could return, what were they thinking to sell them again. The points were too obvious to be disputed. There wasn't anything they could say to justify themselves.

So I called a great assembly against them. 8 And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say Neh. 5:7-8

His Solution to Resolve these things

These sins were not good. They reflected on their lack of fear of God and the reproach it was creating among the nations around them. They were also a threat to the project. Nehemiah leads the way in the solution. He would lend (not give) them what they needed and then allow them to repay it as they had opportunity without interest

He then demands they restore the interest they had unlawfully taken from the people and restored their lands and possessions so they might have the opportunity to repay the debts they had incurred.

Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? 10 I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! 11 Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them." 12 So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Neh 5:9-12

Even the Priests were Guilty

Finally, he calls the priest and takes an oath of them that they would keep their word about restoring and no longer taking interest. Both the guilty and the oppressed are happy with this outcome and all cry Amen! Give praise to God, and fulfill their word.

Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. 13 Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise. Neh 5:12-13

Nehemiah's Generosity

The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of the book to reveal Nehemiah's own conduct. We incidently

learn that he was the governor there for 12 years, which must have been the time he had told the king after being asked how long he would be gone. While he had the authority, he did all in his own power to help the cruel situation there. He refused to take even his own allotment for the work he was doing. He used his authority as governor to release them from these taxes and refused to allow any of the servants who were working under him to use any form of oppression or taxation on them. In comparison to all the other governors who had been before him, he was a welcome relief to the common people who must have been able to prosper and remove their debts.

His final words reveal that he continued to focus his efforts on the wall all the while he was there and did not get involved in commerce. He and his servants were only there to work.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

Neh. 5:14-16

Even with the heavy burdens the government placed upon Nehemiah, he found other means to fund them. He fed 150 Jews and rulers and all the visitors (ambassadors and dignitaries) from other nations. As he lists the provisions one can see it was a lot of money, but Nehemiah found ways to pay for it without burdening the common people. All this because at this meeting he had seen all the terrible problems these people were still facing.

And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people. 19 Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. Neh. 5:17-19

Threats Against Nehemiah

In the next account of the work, the enemies are still working to destroy the progress on the wall. Due to their diligence, the only openings left in the wall that the enemies could enter were the gates. Now the enemies try a more subtle approach. They tell him they only want to "talk" to him. Some ruse or another such as a petition for peace or some official duty that they claimed he needed to be in their presence to resolve or complete. But Nehemiah knew the real reason was to "do me harm." So he told them he was too busy to meet with them. He had a commission from the king so there was nothing else they could do except invite him again and again up to four times.

Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), 2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm. 3 So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" 4 But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner. Neh. 6:1-4

Tactics change again when Sanballat sends a different letter the fifth time. This time it contains what Sanballat believes will convince Nehemiah to come. He now states that Nehemiah has been accused of treason. The rumor is that he plans to rebel against Medo-Persia and that is the reason for the wall. Also, that the rebellion is already well under way. His goal is to lead Nehemiah out of fear to come and meet with him as he is offering help to solve this problem.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king. 7 And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

Neh. 6:5-7

Nehemiah is not deceived. First, he knows that this rumor has no basis in fact. He also knows that the king in Medo-Persia has complete trust in him and that he could easily defend himself against these charges. He either knew or later learned that this was a plot to bring fear. Even if Nehemiah wouldn't come so they could assassinate him, it would at least cause some of the Jews to become

afraid and discouraged which would slow or even stop the work. Nehemiah responds with a prayer that was either personal or a public one that all would Amen.

Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." 9 For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Neh. 6:8-9

The final attempt to destroy Nehemiah and keep the walls from being completed was to shame him and bring reproach upon him that would cause everyone to lose respect for him. Once again, it is an imminent plot to kill him. This time, a secret informer was used. We don't know much about Shemaiah, but it is clear that he proclaimed himself to be a prophet that God had sent to save him. (6:12) He sought to make this a matter of great urgency. The plot is laid and your death will come that very night. The solution is to hide within the temple, which was something that was not lawful for anyone but the priests to enter.

Afterward I came to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was a secret informer; and he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you; indeed, at night they will come to kill you."

Neh. 6:10

Nehemiah's righteousness and godliness shield him from this danger. He would never do such a thing even if it meant his life. He refused to do so. Soon after this, he realized that God had not sent this man with this message. Perhaps the message itself gave him this insight or maybe in the next few days after it happened, he found out all the facts. He had given this prophesy at the urging of Nehemiah's enemies. He had sought to lead Nehemiah to sin so they could reproach him and discourage the people. Once again he prays to God to remember the evil these people have done and take His own vengeance upon them.

And I said, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there such as I who would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in!" 12 Then I perceived that God had not sent him at all, but that he pronounced this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. 13 For this reason he was hired, that I should be afraid and act that way and sin, so that they might have cause for an evil report, that they might reproach me. 14 My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works, and the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who would have made me afraid.

Neh. 6:11-14

The Wall is Completed

With the statement above that Nehemiah continued to work on the wall for the entire 12 years he was there, *"Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work."* (5:16). Therefore, it is the completion of the walls and gates that were enough for the enemies to see that they were now in a fortified city that could not easily be breached that are described here. Since the work will continue for the next twelve years, it is evident that these words do not mean it was fully completed.

The fact that the city was now protected from all attacks created a great discouragement among the enemies because they knew that threats and intimidation would no longer work. Also it became evident to them that God had been working with them.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Neh. 6:15-16

Although the threat of attack had been removed, the conspiracy continued. Tobiah had many spies and friends among the Jews. The people mentioned here are not mentioned elsewhere with any clarity to identify them in connection to what they were doing among the Jews. They were pledged to this enemy both by family and other ties. So there was constant communication. They were informing Tobiah all of Nehemiah's actions and plans and at the same time speaking highly of Tobiah to Nehemiah. The threatening letters also continued.

Also in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came to them. 18 For many in Judah were pledged to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shechaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. 19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me. Neh. 6:15-19

After the wall was completed Nehemiah delegated the daily activities of the gates to a Hanani

whom he calls his brother. We have no information about him. Some try to connect him to the Hanani who spoke with Nehemiah at the very beginning of the book. But though this is a possibility, there is no way to prove it. Yet, he is a faithful man and Nehemiah felt confident to place this very important job to him. With all the enemies, it is probable that someone would seek to bribe someone who is watching or locking these gates, so Hanani had to be a man Nehemiah could trust with all of it.

He commanded that the gates be closely guarded and not opened until the sun was high enough in the sky to be hot. Each gate was to be shut, barred and guarded at night. Not only were the gates to be guarded but each man was to keep watch in his own home.

Then it was, when the wall was built and I had hung the doors, when the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, 2 that I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many. 3 And I said to them, "Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house." Neh. 7:1-3

Review:

Nehemiah the cupbearer of the king of the Medo Persian empire has come to Jerusalem as governor to bring the city back into a condition similar to what it was before the captivity. Israel had returned from captivity in 538 and it is now 444. Their sloth and discouragement had allowed almost 100 years to pass and still the city was lying waste and nearly uninhabited. In a period of 52 days, Nehemiah had changed all that. Now they were safe in a walled city. No safer in respect to God's providential care, but much safer in the eyes of the world. It is always a terrible thing when the conduct of God's people makes it appear that God is not with them. Because they had allowed the temple to lie waste for twenty years and the wall for a hundred years, the enemies could not see the power of God among them. With that change, the enemies saw them in a different light.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God. Neh. 6:15-16

Now that the city had been partially restored to its former glory, it was time to bring the people into the same condition. First, Nehemiah finds a way to bring many people back into the city and then, with Ezra's help, they begin the task of restoring the people.

Filling Jerusalem with People

We see from this passage that even the houses within the city were still torn down and bore the marks of the consequences of Judah's sin. So Nehemiah does the research in the genealogies that had left off with Chronicles and continued by Ezra (Ezra 2:1-70). Since Ezra is mentioned at this time, it is probable that the two had consulted together. Ezra is here called the scribe which at the least implies that the commission he had brought from Medo Persia fourteen years earlier may have expired. This is the first time Ezra is mentioned in Nehemiah, but since it had only been 52 days to build the wall, and this is the next event, it is very probable that Ezra had been there the entire time. But God left it all unrevealed, so all we can do is speak of probabilities and possibilities. All we know is that at this time Ezra is reintroduced at the very moment when the genealogies in his book are discussed and used to prepared the people.

Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return, and found written in it: 6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city. 7 Those who came with Zerubbabel were . . . Neh. 7:4-7

Since a careful comparison of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 reveal that they are nearly identical. some form of discussion between these two men occurred. Both accounts have exactly the same concluding numbers: Whole assembly 42,360, 7,337 male and female servants, 200 singing men and women, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels 6,720 donkeys.

66 Altogether the whole assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 67 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five men and women singers. 68 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 69 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. Neh. 7:66-69

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred men and women singers. 66 Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, 67 their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. Ezra 2:64-67

Nehemiah gathers all the Jews who are left in the land, and using these genealogies, determines who is a priest and who is not and where each man should be living, based on his tribe and their lots. As the seventh chapter closes, it is clear that everything is now prepared for the meeting Nehemiah intended to gather. All the people have been verified, those who have no proof have been removed from the priesthood, and the only thing that remained was to gather them.

*So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. **When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their***

cities. Neh. 7:73

The People Gather to Jerusalem and Ezra Reads the Law

The meeting of all the people occurred in the seventh month. Since they learned of the feast of tabernacles while there, that was not the reason for their coming, nor the day of atonement which did not require their presence in Jerusalem. This was the meeting described above that Nehemiah had demanded: "*Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy.*" After they had resolved the issues regarding genealogy, Nehemiah took the opportunity to have Ezra bring the book of the Law where all could hear and read it from morning until mid day. All the men and women remained attentive the entire time.

Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. Neh. 8:1-3

We are given a clear picture of this event. Ezra is standing on a platform made of wood and on his right side were five men and on the left side there were seven. No reason is given for the unequal dividing of these men. This platform was high enough over the people that everyone could easily see him. As Ezra opened the book of the law, all the people stood to show they respect. Then Ezra led a prayer in which he blessed and praised God. As he ended his words, all the people cried out Amen twice and they also lifted up their hands. They were then moved by the moment and the great things that had been done. The walls were completed, the genealogies were fixed and the nation was ready to move forward.

4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Neh. 8:4-6

Others were among the people possibly dividing them up into smaller groups and giving them a "class" on the words that Ezra was reading so that they would understand the sense.

7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. 8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading. Neh. 8:7-8

As the assembly drew to a close, Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levite encouraged the people. The people were weeping, hopefully in sorrow and repentance. They are encouraged not to sorrow as this was also a time of great joy.

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. 10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Neh. 8:9-12

The Feast of Tabernacles

The next morning the classes continued but this time with the leaders. As they gathered to Ezra to understand the words of the Law. They learned of the feast of tabernacles. It was their duty to proclaim this in all Israel, as well as bring the branches to make booths (tabernacles) to dwell in. This was quickly done and preparations were made to celebrate this feast.

13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and

Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law. 14 And they found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." Neh. 8:13-15

The next seven days were spent in these booths in which they would stay outside. One can only imagine the excitement of the children in getting to sleep outside and how that must have moved to the parents as well. They were individually built on their rooftops and courtyards and those without a place to do it moved into the large courtyards in the city near the gates. It is amazing to read that from the days of Joshua and through all the kings this feast had not been kept like this. Each day God's word was continually read

16 Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim. 17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness. 18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner. Neh. 8:16-18

The People Repent and Seal a Covenant with God

After the joyous occasion, the reason for the tears is revealed. They now come fasting in sackcloth and dust on their heads. They began confessing their sins as well as those of their fathers. Once again they read from the law for 1/4th of the day which was how the watches in the night were timed. Day and night were considered as 12 hours each and each watch was three hours during the night. Hence this is a three hour meeting. Then they took another three hours to confess and worship.

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. 2 Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for one-fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God. Neh 9:1-3

The Jews now acknowledge the justice that has led to the high taxes of the foreign kings who were now reigning over them because of their sins. They also acknowledge that the dominion that has been forced upon them, they seek to make a sure covenant. These words ring hollow after Nehemiah leaves and they immediately violate these things again.

36 "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, To eat its fruit and its bounty, Here we are, servants in it! 37 And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, Because of our sins; Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle At their pleasure; And we are in great distress. 38 "And because of all this, We make a sure covenant and write it; Our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it." Neh 9:36-38

Even further, the rest of the people joined with the nobles to enter both a curse and an oath, which they too will violate not long after Nehemiah leaves. The promised to keep all the law, to keep their sons and daughters undefiled from the people of the land, and to never violate the Sabbath.

28 Now the rest of the people — the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the Nethinim, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, everyone who had knowledge and understanding — 29 these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes: 30 We would not give our daughters as wives to the peoples of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons; 31 if the peoples of the land brought wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and we would forego the seventh year's produce and the exacting of every debt. Neh 10:28-31

The Nature of the Covenant

At the urging of Ezra and Nehemiah, all the ordinances and customs of the old law were reinstated. The annual 1/3 of a shekel for the service of the house of God. Lots were cast for the bringing of wood to the altar

Also we made ordinances for ourselves, to exact from ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the showbread, for the regular grain offering, for the regular burnt offering of the Sabbaths, the New Moons, and the set feasts; for the holy things, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. 34 **We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar ...** 35 **And we made ordinances to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, to the house of the Lord; ... and to bring the tithes of our land to the Levites,** Neh. 10:32-38

The next step was to seek a means to fill the city with enough people that it too can be rebuilt and feel like the city it once was. While all the leaders had already chosen to dwell in Jerusalem, now the common people decide that the too need to take up residence. Yet there are not enough volunteers, so they decided to cast lots. They set it up so that for every group of ten people, the lot would select one. Since there were about 40,000 people they wanted 4,000 of them to dwell in Jerusalem.

Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths were to dwell in other cities. 2 And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem. Neh 11:1-2

The Dedication of the Wall in Jerusalem

We have no time frame between 12:26 and 12:27. Yet it appears unlikely that it was the same time frame as the previous. Since they were all present at the gathering Nehemiah had made earlier, and now “*they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem,*” it appears as though they had left and were now sought to come back. But whether it was six months or just as possible nearing the end of Nehemiah’s time in Jerusalem: “*But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem (Neh. 13:6).*”

Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps. 28 And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem. 30 Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall. Neh. 12:27-30

The singers sang loudly with Jezrahiah the director. 43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. Neh. 12:42-43

The Removal of God’s Enemies

Whether by design or by accident at this reading of the Law, they found the passage written after Balaam had been hired to curse Israel that “*no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God.*” At that time all those who had come from these nations were separated along with others of a “*mixed multitude.*”

On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel. Neh 13:1-3

A Gap of Some Years and Nehemiah’s Return and Need to Reform Again

An Ammonite in the Temple
Again, the time frame is impossible to determine. Nehemiah has left and after some time returned. We only know he was gone long enough for all the problems needing to be resolved had been created. The storeroom in the temple that had been set aside for all the grain offerings (a tithe of many thousands of farmers) would have been a sizeable room. Tobiah is identified several times

as "*Tobiah the Ammonite official*" (Neh 2:10). Hence he should have remained banished per the law that had been enacted just prior to Nehemiah's departure. There was not excuse of not knowing after this event. Eliashib is identified as "*Eliashib the high priest*" (Neh. 3:1). So the high priest was guilty of a clear violation of the law.

With Nehemiah's return and finding things in such disarray, he became bitterly grieved and immediately set out to restore order. He throws out all of Tobiah's belongings, cleanses the room of its defilement and places the grain back in the room.

Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, ... which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. Neh. 13:4-9

Temple Empty because Levites Neglected

This was only the surface. With the removal of the grain from the temple, came the graft and dishonest of someone keeping all that grain for themselves. The Levites being neglected, they had no choice but to go back to farming their fields. So the entire worship of God had been neglected for some time before Nehemiah's return. The corrupt high priest and the self-imposed banishment of the Levites had led to the entire temple being forsaken. Nehemiah puts everything back into its proper order beginning with the leaders who had taken on far too much authority, even setting aside the commands of God. When all Judah sees that things are back to a lawful condition they begin to bring the tithes and soon things are back into the manner God required of them. He also appointed men to be treasurers and thus accountable so that things would continue to be done honestly and with integrity. Because they were seen to be faithful, he knew things would be done properly as long as he was there.

He concludes this section with a phrase he has used several times in the letter beginning in 5:19, "*remember me for good.*" He will repeat this in Neh. 13:14, 22, 31

I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. 11 So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. 14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services! Neh. 13:10-14

Sabbath Violated

Not only had the leaders stolen the tithes from the people, but they had also allowed the violation of the sabbath. Not only were they allowing foreigners to violate it in their midst, but Nehemiah also witnesses them doing it themselves. He calls in the nobles and rebukes them sharply. They have done the very things that had led to their captivity. In such a short time they had revealed that their faithfulness to God was only enforced by Nehemiah's presence.

15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." Neh. 13:4-9

Since the Jewish day began at sunset, Nehemiah ordered the gates closed at dusk and no merchants be allowed to enter and no burdens be carried into the city. The sellers believed this

would be short lived (probably because the avarice of the leaders), but Nehemiah quickly revealed to them that this was permanent. He threatens to put them in jail if he sees them there again. That was enough and they did not return again.

19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. 21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy! Neh. 13:19-23

Israel has returned to the practice of giving their sons and daughter to the heathen

Nehemiah's final reform at the close of his book is to once again restore the purity of the seed, just as Ezra had been required to do. Their promises and oaths, quickly forgotten they were deeply into this practice when Nehemiah returned. So far into it that some of their children could not speak the language of the Jews but spoke a foreign language. He punished them for their rebellion and violation of their oath. He reminded them that even Solomon could not withstand the influence of foreign women.

In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. 25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" Neh. 13:4-9

One of the grandchildren of the high priest had married the daughter of Sanballat the evil enemy of Israel who had sought to stop the building of the walls, even threatening them with death. Yet this man, who might have been in line for the high priesthood, had defiled himself. Once again violating a law that priests could only marry the virgin daughter of those in Israel. He carefully sifted the things in their lives and "removed everything that was pagan.

And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. 30 Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, 31 and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good! Neh. 13:28-31

The book of Nehemiah ends with his desire that God will remember his acts of faithfulness and restore goodness to him. Like Jesus said, this man was laying up for himself treasures in heaven.