

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 68.1%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Nehemiah 2

Monday: Nehemiah 3 & 4

Tuesday: Nehemiah 5

Wednesday: Nehemiah 6 through Nehemiah 7:3

Thursday: Nehemiah 7:4 through Nehemiah 8

Friday: Nehemiah 9

Saturday: Nehemiah 10 & 11

Current # of email addresses in the group: 628

I hope you each had a great study week.

We read most of Nehemiah 7 back in study week 100 when we read Ezra 2. We will read it again this week with a tiny bit more commentary on it.

As I laid out the rest of the Old Testament program today, I realized that this is our 2<sup>nd</sup> to last week and we will finish it next week. We will then take a 1 week break before starting the New Testament as San Francisco is hosting a young adult weekend the following week that I will need to focus on preparing for.

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

[https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA\\_tacLBfv1XR3jH](https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH)

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

### **3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 106**

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 715 – SUNDAY: August 10<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "It is some time before Nehemiah says something about the Judean situation to Artaxerxes. "There was a delay

of about four months from Kislev (Nov.-Dec.) [445 B.C.], when Nehemiah first heard the news ([Nehemiah 1:1](#)), to Nisan (Mar.-Apr.) [444 B.C.], when he felt prepared to broach the subject to the king. There are various explanations for this. The king may have been absent in his other winter palace at Babylon. Perhaps the king was not in the right mood. Even though Nehemiah was a favorite of the king, he would not have rashly blurted out his request. We know it was politic to make one's requests during auspicious occasions such as birthday parties or when rulers were in a generous mood ([Genesis 40:20](#); [Esther 5:6](#); [Mark 6:21-25](#); Jos[ephus] *Antiq[uities of the Jews]* XVIII, 289-93 {viii.7}). It is certain that Nehemiah did not ask in haste but carefully bided his time, constantly praying to God to grant the proper opening" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Nehemiah 2:1](#)).

At last an opportunity presents itself when the king asks him about his downcast demeanor. Nehemiah had hidden his feelings up to this point (verses 1-2). Perhaps it was too hard to contain them any longer, though it could well be that he purposely let his feelings show on this occasion to provide a segue into making his request. In any case, the moment is now prime to speak, but Nehemiah is filled with trepidation. As *The Nelson Study Bible* points out, "Persian monarchs believed that just being in their presence would make any person happy. Yet, Nehemiah was about to request the emperor's permission to go to Jerusalem, suggesting that he would rather be somewhere other than in the emperor's presence. On top of that, it was Artaxerxes himself who had ordered the work on the wall to be stopped (see [Ezra 4:21-23](#)). Nehemiah had reason to be afraid" (note on [Nehemiah 2:2](#)).

Yet, of course, Nehemiah in reality had more reason to *not* fear. And despite his concerns, he sets a wonderful example for all of us in dealing with this difficult moment in a manner that gives him the confidence to proceed. He silently prays to the ultimate ruler of heaven

and earth, Almighty God, probably asking for the right words to say and that his request is well received (verse 5).

The response of verse 6 is extremely encouraging. Whereas Artaxerxes could have had Nehemiah executed then and there, the king instead asks him how long he would be gone. And then remarkably this king who had ordered the cessation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls happily gives permission to Nehemiah to return and resume the construction. Moreover, we are told in [Nehemiah 5:14](#) that Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah as governor of the land of Judah when he sent him.

There may have been broader political considerations for the king's decision. Recall that the satrap Megabyzus, who had led the region under his authority containing Judea in revolt against Persian rule, had renewed his fealty to the emperor only three years earlier. Thus, "the Syro-Palestinian satrapy was [still] in a very precarious position as far as Artaxerxes was concerned. He knew full well that what had happened once could happen again and that he might be unable to recover his rebellious territories the next time. Clearly he was willing to do anything that might consolidate his position and ensure continued loyalty from his volatile subjects. When Nehemiah volunteered to go to Jerusalem to stabilize the situation there, Artaxerxes saw in the request not only a way to accede to the heartfelt burden of his beloved cupbearer for his Jewish kinfolk, but a way to place someone over Judah whom he could trust to remain loyal to Persia and to achieve a climate of tranquility and order" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 508). Moreover, it was probably in the confusion of Megabyzus' rebellion that Artaxerxes gave the earlier order to halt the refortification of Jerusalem's defenses. Further reports from the region may have revealed the Jews under Ezra as not having sided with the revolt—which would have been more reason to allow them to resume the work of restoring their holy city.

Nehemiah received from the king safe-conduct letters and a military escort. Ezra did not have such an escort on his journey because he would not ask for it lest it appear a lack of faith. Perhaps Nehemiah did not need to ask. Furthermore, this escort would have provided convincing proof of Nehemiah's investiture of authority in his visits to the provincial governors. The king also provided him with requisition orders for obtaining lumber for work in Jerusalem on the gates of the citadel just northwest of the temple (which overlooked the temple complex), on the city wall and on the governor's residence in which he would live.

In verses 9-10 we see that not everyone is pleased with the arrival of Nehemiah and his company. Verse 10 mentions the Samaritan leader Sanballat the Horonite. He "is attested to in the Aramaic papyri of Elephantine [i.e., of the Jewish community on the Nile island of Elephantine in southern Egypt] as having been governor of Samaria in the seventeenth year of Darius II, that is, in 407 [B.C.]. Since by then he had adult sons, it is certainly reasonable that he had been governor forty years earlier [when Nehemiah first arrived]" (Merrill, p. 509). Sanballat being called a Horonite seems to refer to his coming from the city of Beth-Horon, 12 miles northwest of Jerusalem. As this town was within the territory of Judea, it may be that Sanballat's authority had reached into Judea before Nehemiah's arrival—which would give greater impetus to his opposition.

Tobiah is referred to as "the servant, the Ammonite" (KJV). "Servant" probably denotes being a servant of the king—which is why the NKJV gives the word here as "official." The reference to Ammon probably refers not to his ethnicity but to his area of administrative oversight. For Tobiah is actually an Israelite name meaning "Yhwh Is Good." This would seem to make him at least part Jewish. And there is more reason to think so. We elsewhere learn that he was married to a Jewish woman—the daughter of a certain Shechaniah (compare [Nehemiah](#)

[3:29](#); [Nehemiah 6:18](#); not the Shechaniah of [Ezra 10:2](#)). Tobiah gave an Israelite name to his own son—Jehohanan (meaning "Yhwh Is Merciful"). He too married a Jewish woman—the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah, leader of one of the groups repairing the wall (compare [Nehemiah 3:4](#), [Nehemiah 3:30](#); [Nehemiah 6:18](#)).

As *Expositor's* notes on 2:10: "Some scholars speculate that Tobiah descended from an aristocratic [Israelite] family [known as the Tobiads] that owned estates in Gilead and was influential in Transjordan and in Jerusalem even as early as the eighth century B.C." The same commentary goes on to conclude: "Tobiah was no doubt the governor of Ammon or Transjordan under the Persians. His grandson Tobiah is called 'the governor of Ammon.' The site of Araq el-Emir ('caverns of the prince'), about eleven miles west of Amman, was the center of the Tobiads. The visible remains of a large building on top of the hill (Qasr el-'Abd, 'castle of the slave [or servant],' 60 by 120 feet) have been interpreted as a Jewish temple built by a later Tobiad. On two halls are inscriptions with the name Tobiah in Aramaic characters. The date of the inscriptions is much disputed"—but they nonetheless illustrate the persistence of this name among the Ammonite governors during the Persian and Greek periods. [Nehemiah 6:18](#) tells us that many in Judah were pledged to his service, so he too seems to have exercised a significant measure of control within the province.

These men were greatly concerned despite the fact that Nehemiah had not actually told them or even the Judeans why he had really come. To further conceal his intentions, he decides to secretly inspect the city wall by night. "Since Nehemiah had arrived in Jerusalem from the north, he would have seen that side of the wall as he approached the city. If he lived in the southwestern part of the city, he could have had ample time for viewing the western wall. Nehemiah seems to have been concerned with inspecting the southern and eastern walls of Jerusalem. With a few servants, he passed through the Valley Gate into the Valley of Hinnom. He then traveled along the south wall. When the

piles of stone and heaps of rubble obstructed his passage, he dismounted his animal and continued on foot up the Kidron valley in order to view the eastern wall" (*Nelson*, note on verses 12-15).

"Apparently the eastern slope of the City of David was in an impassable condition due to collapsed retaining walls and ruined structures" (*The Holman Bible Atlas*, 1998, p. 172).

We next see that Nehemiah was an inspirational and motivational leader—able to stir the Jews into resuming work on the city wall (verses 17-18). It is wonderful to read the enthusiasm of their response: "Let us rise up and build."

As a side note, it is interesting to consider that no specific mention is made of Ezra at this point, although he could have been among the priests or officials mentioned in verse 16. We do see him later in the book but not until chapter 8. This has led some to question the traditional chronology of Ezra's return preceding that of Nehemiah. Yet the Bible makes it clear that Ezra came to Judea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes ([Ezra 7:8](#)) while Nehemiah came in the 20th (2:1). It could well be that Ezra was not playing as prominent a role at this later time, 13 years after the prior mention of him in Ezra 10—especially considering the earlier Samaritan action that Artaxerxes ordered against the Jewish rebuilding. Ezra could have been sidelined as governor. Perhaps Sanballat or Tobiah had been given administrative authority over Judea—or possibly just assumed control. Furthermore, as a priest and scribe, Ezra may have decided to devote himself more to his religious duties—and perhaps now deferred to the leadership of the high priest Eliashib (see [Nehemiah 3:1](#)). Age and health could also have been factors. Nevertheless, we will see Ezra mentioned again in a spiritual leadership role in Nehemiah 8. And tradition reckons him as the one who established the Hebrew Bible in its present form—a paramount responsibility.

Returning to the story, the renewed work on the city wall provokes ridicule and derision from Sanballat, Tobiah and another foreign leader, Geshem the Arab (spelled Gashmu in the Hebrew of 6:2). This man is "documented outside the Bible.... The primary source of information is a silver bowl discovered in 1947 at Tell el-Mashkutah in Lower [i.e., northern] Egypt. Like three other such bowls it has a dedicatory inscription to the goddess Han'-llat; in addition, it has the line, 'that which Qaynu, son of Gašmu, king of Qedar, brought in offering to Han'-llat.' Gašmu is the biblical Geshem. On the basis of the particular Aramaic writing, the nature of the bowl, and Athenian coins discovered at the same site, this inscription has been dated [to the right time frame of] around 400 [B.C.]" (Merrill, p. 509). As the king of Qedar or Kedar—a nation of nomads in northern Arabia—Geshem and his people would have "served the Persians by controlling the caravan routes between Palestine and Egypt" ("Lingering Resentment Boils Over," *Word in Life Bible*, sidebar on 4:7).

These leaders' accusations of defying the emperor ([Nehemiah 2:19](#)) were not sincere, as Nehemiah had already given them the royal decree expressing the king's will in this matter (see verse 9). These antagonists were quite resistant "to the reestablishment of Judah as a viable and powerful rival to their own principalities. They had no doubt sided with Megabyzus in his rebellion and now correctly saw Nehemiah as a strong pro-Persian sent among them to police the region as the henchman of Artaxerxes himself. That they dared to interfere with Nehemiah's project shows a certain residue of independence from Persia, especially since the content of Artaxerxes' letter of authorization was well known to them" (Merrill, pp. 509-510).

Nehemiah rebuffed them, confident in God's providential care for His people and His desire to reestablish them in Jerusalem (verse 20)."  
[END]



Day 716 – MONDAY: August 11<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 3 & 4

Daily Deep Dive:

Before you read the commentary today, I would encourage you to see the image on the UCG website of Jerusalem's Wall in the days of Nehemiah found here:

<https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-commentary/beyond-today-bible-commentary-nehemiah/nehemiah-3>

The UCG reading plan states: "The Jews immediately commence rebuilding the city wall according to Nehemiah's organization of the work. He assigns various sections to different groups—families, neighborhoods and even professional guilds. The people had to work together not only within their particular teams but also in cooperation with other teams. Note how many times the phrase "next to them" occurs in the chapter. Major building work always takes work teams cooperating together. This is true even in the spiritual work of the people of God's Church today.

There was much work to be done. *The Holman Bible Atlas* states: "Nehemiah 3 contains numerous references to gates and structures along Jerusalem's fortifications. Unfortunately, identifying archaeological remains with any of these structures has been difficult, yet archaeologists have provided a clearer picture of Nehemiah's Jerusalem. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., settlers confined themselves to the eastern ridge, the old City of David and the Temple Mount. There is no evidence of any occupation of the western ridge during the Persian era, although parts of Hezekiah's walls must have remained in fragmentary condition. Settlement upon the City of David apparently was more constricted than ever before. Much of the eastern slope perhaps was left unprotected, as a new line of defense was established farther up the slope, perhaps built along the line of a much earlier wall. Fragments of a wall built of roughly dressed limestone near the crest have been identified by some archaeologists



as 'Nehemiah's Wall,' but others believe the 'wall' is actually a quarry line. A few of the domestic structures on the eastern slope were reused, but most buildings were located on the crest of the ridge.

"The fact that Nehemiah completed his initial repairs in fifty-two days [as we will see in [Nehemiah 6:15](#)] argues strongly that segments of the earlier defenses must have been still standing; presumably the western line of defense and the walls enclosing the Temple Mount were on the same lines as those prior to 586 B.C. The Valley Gate ([Nehemiah 3:13](#)), along the Tyropoeon Valley [on the west side], has tentatively been identified by some scholars with remains dating from the Iron Age. The location of other gates in Nehemiah 3 are more speculative. It seems reasonable to locate the Water Gate ([Nehemiah 3:26](#)) near the Gihon Spring [on the east side] and the Fountain Gate at the base of the southeastern hill ([Nehemiah 2:14](#); [Nehemiah 3:15](#)). Several towers mentioned in Nehemiah 3 (the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred) undoubtedly lay along the northern defenses where Jerusalem was most vulnerable. Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day was slightly smaller than the city of David and Solomon, perhaps covering thirty-seven to thirty-eight acres" (p. 172).

Finally, we should observe that the work in Jerusalem was done by people from all walks of life—just as it is in the Church of God today. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes on verse 32: "We know from chapter 5 that there were deep economic differences in Judean society. With the exception of the nobles of Tekoa (v. 5), everyone pitched in, from the high priest (v. 1) to goldsmiths and perfume makers (vv. 8, 31) and even women (v. 12), to accomplish a common task. Some, like the commoners of Tekoa, even did more than their share (v. 27). What an inspiring example of what can be done when God's people work together under dynamic leadership! Viggo Olsen, who helped rebuild ten thousand houses in war-ravaged Bangladesh in 1972, derived unexpected inspiration from reading a chapter ordinarily

considered one of the least interesting in the Bible: 'I was struck...that no expert builders were listed in the "Holy Land brigade." There were priests, priests' helpers, goldsmiths, perfume makers, and women, but no expert builders or carpenters were named.'"

## **The Wall Under Threat**

Even as Sanballat and Tobiah contemptuously mocked the Jewish rebuilding effort (verses 1-2), we can perhaps sense the panic behind their words. They were really worried. Jewish success could mean their demise. While their taunting and ridicule is intended to shake the confidence of the Jews, it is also a self-deceptive way of steadying their own shaken confidence.

Nehemiah does not answer them. Instead, he prays to God to turn the reproach back on their heads and that their sin not be blotted out—recognizing that they were actually belittling God Himself (verses 4-5). This is not a prayer for eliminating any possibility that they would ever find forgiveness through repentance. It is simply asking that God, as a matter of justice and defending His reputation, not let what they have done go undealt with.

In verse 6 we see that the confidence of the people is not shaken. Their minds are instead set on the task assigned to them and they succeed in joining the wall's sections together—though not yet to full height.

News of this development infuriates the Jews' enemies, as Jerusalem would soon be a strong fortress. In addition to Sanballat and Tobiah, we also see reference here to the Arabs (among whom Geshem was a leader—see [Nehemiah 2:19](#)), the Ammonites (of whom Tobiah was apparently governor) and the Ashdodites ([Nehemiah 4:7](#)). Ashdod was one of the five principal cities of the Philistines. Yet those who lived there at this time may not have been full-blooded Philistines. The Assyrians destroyed the city in 711 B.C. It was later controlled by the

Babylonians and then the Persians, who repopulated it. "With the Persian conquest alternate patches of the Palestinian coast were parceled out to the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon, which provided ships for the Persian navy. During this period Ashdod was the most important city on the Philistine coast" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 7).

The Jews' enemies lashing out in anger is not a matter of genuine indignation but of alarm. They are rather afraid of what is happening. As they see it, things have gotten out of control—that is, out of *their* control. They decide that they had better put a stop to this business right away—before it is too late. So they begin plotting against the Jews.

The Jews resort to their only sure defense—prayer to Almighty God. This time it is a collective prayer of the people, not merely a private prayer of Nehemiah (verse 9). Yet even as they pray, they do what they humanly can to protect themselves by posting watchmen at all times.

In verse 10 we see that the great task of rebuilding is taking its toll on the Jewish workers. Fatigue and the sheer volume of debris lead to discouragement. In the next verse we see that despite the posted watch, the adversaries seem to think that they can still catch the builders by surprise. But the plot is discovered before it can be executed.

The Jews are then arrayed for battle and exhorted to bravery on the basis of two factors: 1) The people are to remember all that God has done for His people; and 2) the people are to reflect on the fact that they, unlike their enemies, are defending their homeland and families. But the attack doesn't come. Foiled in their hopes for a surprise attack, the adversaries are so far unwilling to challenge the Jews' newly instituted security measures.

There are spiritual parallels to the dual responsibilities in verse 17. We must not neglect our own spiritual survival and security, nor must we neglect doing the Work of God.

The last three words of the chapter in the original Hebrew—*is silho hammayim*—as *Expositor's* notes on verse 23, "are notoriously difficult to interpret; they are literally 'each man his weapon the water'.... The NIV rendering is similar to that of the RV: 'every one (went with) his weapon (to) the water,' and the JPS: 'every one that went to the water had his weapon.' This would parallel the way Gideon's selected men drank their water with weapons in hand as an indication of their vigilance.... The Vulgate took the word *silho*, not in the sense of 'his weapon,' but as a verb meaning 'stripped himself'... ('every one stripped himself when he was to be washed'). This sense was followed by the KJV [and NKJV]: 'every one put them [i.e., their clothes] off for washing'"—that is, *only* for washing.

Despite the still-constant threat of enemy attack, the rebuilding work went on." [END]

Day 717 – TUESDAY: August 12<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "No sooner is the external threat of attack staved off, at least temporarily, that another development threatens the progress of the Jews in rebuilding Jerusalem's wall and their well being in general—this time from within. It seems likely that the problems described in this passage had been brewing for a long time—well before Nehemiah ever arrived. And now, with the current prolonged period of hard work, constant alert, inevitable fatigue and diminished regular income due to time spent on rebuilding the wall, things at last came to a head.

Verse 3 mentions a famine. Perhaps it was not severe, but even a minor one would have produced food shortages, making available food more expensive. Exacerbating the situation was the outside enemy threat, which likely kept the people of Jerusalem pent up behind their new defenses—away from access to the produce of the countryside. Some now come seeking relief because they have large families, compounding their need for grain (verse 2). Even many landowners had mortgaged their lands and homes (verse 3), so the produce of even accessible lands probably went to other people as repayment. These other people were not foreign authorities but fellow Jews. The outcry of the people in verse 1 is "against their Jewish brethren." The rich were getting richer, and the poor were getting poorer.

Verses 4-5 describe some who borrowed money and even sold their children into slavery to pay property taxes to the king. This was not an unusual circumstance in the Persian Empire, which taxed excessively, removing vast sums of money from circulation and thereby running up inflation. "Documents from Babylonia show that many inhabitants of this satrapy too had to mortgage their fields and orchards to get silver for the payment of taxes to the king. In many cases they were unable to redeem their property, and became landless hired labourers; sometimes they were compelled to give away their children into slavery. According to some Egyptian data, the taxation was so heavy that the peasants fled to the cities, but were arrested by the nomarchs [regional governors] and brought back by force" (M. Dandamayev, "Achaemenid Babylonia," *Ancient Mesopotamia*, I.M. Diakonoff, ed., 1969, p. 308, quoted in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verse 4). "The acquisition of land by the Persians and its alienation from production helped produce a 50 percent rise in prices" (note on verse 4).

Again, though, it is not the high taxes, inflation or famine that the people are complaining about. They are complaining about each other.

More specifically, the poorer people are complaining about the rich nobles and rulers (see verse 7) in the matters of borrowing money and selling children into slavery with no means to redeem them. The problem in the first matter, as Nehemiah identifies it (verse 7), is the exacting of usury—interest. The law forbade the charging of interest to poor Israelites in need. "The O[ld] T[estament] passages ([Exodus 22:25-27](#); [Leviticus 25:35-37](#); [Deuteronomy 23:19-20](#); [Deuteronomy 24:10-13](#)) prohibiting the giving of loans at interest were not intended to prohibit commercial loans but rather the charging of interest to the impoverished so as to make a profit from the helplessness of one's neighbors" (note on [Nehemiah 5:7](#)). Yet the latter is exactly what was happening. And this led to the second problem—Israelites having to hire themselves and their children out as servants to pay off debt. While this was permissible, it would not have been necessary if the people were not sinking further and further into debt because of the usury. Furthermore, the nobles and rulers were going beyond what was allowed with regard to Israelite servants. They were selling them as slaves (verses 5, 8), which the law expressly prohibited (see [Leviticus 25:35-40](#)).

Beyond these specifics, Scripture roundly condemned greedily profiteering at the expense of others (see [Psalm 119:36](#); [Isaiah 56:9-12](#); [Isaiah 57:17](#); [Jeremiah 6:13](#); [Jeremiah 8:10](#); [Jeremiah 22:13-19](#); [Ezekiel 22:12-14](#); [Ezekiel 33:31](#)). The people were to be looking out for one another's welfare—not exploiting each other. And those more able to help had the responsibility to do so. Yet things were far from that ideal. "The ironic tragedy of the situation for the exiles was that at least in Mesopotamia their families were together. Now because of dire economic necessities, their children were being sold into slavery" (note on verse 5).

Nehemiah is outraged over this terrible, sinful situation (verse 6). It is clear that he knew nothing about it until this point, having only recently arrived.

After he rebukes the nobles, having given a lot of thought to the matter, Nehemiah convenes a "great assembly" against them. Often called the "Great Synagogue," Jewish tradition reckons this as the beginnings of a continuing authority to watch over Jewish religious affairs that persisted until Seleucid Greek times. Historian Alfred Edersheim writes: "It is impossible with certainty to determine, either who composed this assembly, or of how many members it consisted. {The Talmudic notices are often inconsistent. The number as given in them amounts to about 120....} Probably it comprised the leading men in Church and State, the chief priests, elders, and 'judges,' the latter two classes including 'the Scribes,' if, indeed, that order was already separately organised. {[Ezra 10:14](#); [Nehemiah 5:7](#).} Probably also the term 'Great Assembly' [beyond its introduction in [Nehemiah 5:7](#)] refers rather to a succession of men than to one Synod" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, chap. 8). It is this body that is understood to have approved Ezra's canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Regarding the matter at hand, so obvious is the nobles' guilt that they have nothing to say by way of excuse or rebuttal (verse 8). Nehemiah points out two issues that should have been of concern to them in what they have done—showing a lack of appropriate fear of God in disobeying His laws and bringing the Jews and the God they worshiped into disrepute among the surrounding gentile nations (verse 9). Nehemiah classes himself, his relatives and his officials as among those who have been lending money (verse 10)—though he does not state that he himself has been charging interest. He calls for an end to the usury and a restoration of property, money and food with interest.



The nobles agree to Nehemiah's directive, taking an oath regarding the matter, as he requires—and then, encouragingly, they follow through on what they have promised (verses 12-13).

In verse 14, we see that Nehemiah served 12 years in his first term as governor of Judea (444-432 B.C.). At the end of this period he would be recalled to the Persian court ([Nehemiah 13:6](#)), after which he would return for a second term. It is surprising to see that during his administration, Nehemiah and his family did not eat the governor's provisions or tax the people though he had that authority. In verse 15, he mentions previous governors who had abused their authority in this regard. He is surely not referring to Ezra or Zerubbabel. Archaeology has revealed that there were at least three governors of Judea between Zerubbabel and Ezra: Elnathan in the late 6th century B.C. (as revealed on a bulla and seal); Yeho'ezer in the early 5th century (as revealed on a jar impression); and Ahzai in the early 5th century (also revealed on a jar impression) (see *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 15). And it may have been that the Samaritan governor Sanballat and the Ammonite governor Tobiah were acting as de facto governors over parts of Judea prior to Nehemiah's arrival.

As for his own administration, Nehemiah made sure that it was upright and beneficent. Verse 16 shows that "Nehemiah had not acquired mortgages on land. As governor, he could easily have acquired real estate and sold it at great profit. But instead of making money for themselves, Nehemiah and his servants worked on the wall of Jerusalem for the protection of the people and the glory of God" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 16).

Nehemiah's refusal of the governor's provision so as not to further burden the people is made all the more remarkable by the fact that he regularly provided for so many at his table (verses 17-18). *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary* states: "We have a remarkable proof both of the opulence and the disinterestedness [in it] of Nehemiah. As

he declined, on conscientious grounds, to accept the lawful emoluments attached to his government, and yet maintained a style of princely hospitality for twelve years out of his own resources, it is evident that his office of cupbearer at the court of Shushan must have been very lucrative" (note on verse 14).

Indeed, Nehemiah was very wealthy—and yet very generous with his wealth. In verse 19, he prays that God will remember him for good—rewarding him for all that he has done for God's people—a prayer he repeats at the end of the book ([Nehemiah 13:31](#)). This shows what truly motivated Nehemiah. It was not to be revered by other people but to please God, who is "a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" ([Hebrews 11:6](#)). That should be our motivation too—in whatever we do." [END]

Day 718 – WEDNESDAY: August 13<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 6 through Nehemiah 7:3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "When the enemies of the Jews learned that Jerusalem's wall was nearly rebuilt, they decided on a new tactic. Through the pretense of a peace conference in the plain of Ono—modern Kafr 'Ana, about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 10 miles east of Joppa—they would lure Nehemiah out of the city. Their plan was probably to either kidnap or assassinate him. But Nehemiah wasn't fooled and wouldn't take the bait (verses 1-4).

Sanballat then sent a letter to Nehemiah accusing him of planning to rebel against Artaxerxes and set himself up as king—and that he was using lying prophets in his cause. The Samaritan governor implicitly threatens to report this matter to the emperor if Nehemiah will not come out for the meeting (verses 5-7). Yet Nehemiah still refuses to take the bait. He knew that Sanballat would not dare to make such accusations against him to Artaxerxes, as Nehemiah was a trusted

adviser. If anything, this would only have further jeopardized Sanballat's own precarious position. Sanballat's real motive, as Nehemiah realized, was not only a last-ditch effort to scare him into committing to meet, but also that news of his threat would spread so that the Jews, fearing Persian retaliation, would falter in their work on the wall (verses 8-9).

But that was not the end of the intrigue. In verse 10, Nehemiah meets with a certain Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, probably because he was called to his house. The phrase "who was a secret informer" in the NKJV is rendered by most versions in its literal sense: "who was shut up." What exactly this means here is unclear. Some see it as a reference to a state of prophetic ecstasy. Others view it as a temporary quarantine due to ritual impurity. Others see it as a feigned hiding out at home—to make it look like he was in danger. As such, it would have been simply a manipulative attempt to compromise Nehemiah.

The message Shemaiah conveys to Nehemiah is that the governor's life is in danger and that they should go into the temple to hide. Some suggest that Shemaiah, having access to the temple, was a priest. He was evidently laying claim here to also being a prophet—that his message was a prophecy from God (compare verse 12).

Nehemiah rejects Shemaiah's counsel for two reasons. First, to run and hide would be cowardly. He was the governor and, as a leader among God's people, was supposed to set a brave and faithful example among them. Second, this would have been a sin, as Nehemiah was not a priest. While it would have been legitimate to propose taking refuge in the temple area at the altar, the Mosaic Law forbade non-priests from going into the temple building itself on threat of death (see [Numbers 18:1-7](#)). God had punished the Jewish king Uzziah with leprosy for presuming to enter the sanctuary in an attempt to offer incense ([2 Chronicles 26:16-21](#)).

In considering Shemaiah's words, Nehemiah realized that he was a false prophet since he had spoken against the law of God (see [Isaiah 8:20](#)). The governor further realized that this must have been part of the enemies' scheming. Sanballat's letter had accused Nehemiah of using false prophets. But in reality it was the other side that was now employing such methods in an effort to discredit him. Despite the prominence of Sanballat's letter, however, Tobiah is mentioned first in verse 12—probably because he was evidently friendly with a number of the priests and so had likely achieved this particular inroad with Shemaiah (compare verses 18-19; [Nehemiah 13:7-9](#)). In verses 18-19 of chapter 6, we also learn that Tobiah had written his own share of letters in an attempt to scare Nehemiah.

In verse 14, Nehemiah also mentioned a certain prophetess, Noadiah, and other unnamed prophets who were part of the enemy conspiracy. Exactly what role they played is unstated. Perhaps they are the ones who had directed him to meet with Shemaiah.

The exchange of numerous letters, threats of public embarrassment and conspiracy remind of modern political intrigue that employs legal maneuvers and the press to try to force a political outcome. Then, as now, human nature and politics worked hand-in-hand.

The wall was at last completed—52 days (a week shy of two months) after the reconstruction under Nehemiah commenced (verse 15). And thus the wall was built again "even in troublesome times," just as had been foretold in [Daniel 9:25](#). It was now the 25th day of Elul, only five days prior to the Feast of Trumpets. When the Jews' enemies heard of the astounding achievement, and realized that all of their plotting had come to nothing, they were completely demoralized, seeing this as the work of Judah's God (verse 16).

"Once the city was secure, Nehemiah set about the even more important task of reorganizing the government and effecting a sorely

needed spiritual and moral reformation. He first appointed doorkeepers, singers, and other Levitical personnel and designated his brother Hanani as mayor of the city [7:1-2]" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 511). This was the same Hanani who reported to Nehemiah regarding Jerusalem's plight in 1:1-3. "'Hanani' is the shortened form of 'Hananiah' ('Yahweh is gracious').... The Elephantine papyri mention a Hananiah who was the head of Jewish affairs in Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that this Hananiah can be identified with Nehemiah's brother and assume that he succeeded Nehemiah (c. 427)" (*Expositor's*, note on 1:2). The Hananiah of these documents could conceivably be the Hananiah that Nehemiah placed over the Jerusalem citadel ([Nehemiah 7:2](#)) if Nehemiah's brother had died. But Nehemiah's brother seems the likelier person referred to.

We will see more of Nehemiah's reformation in the next few chapters. This would be the crucial part of his work. For while walls were needed, they were not an end in themselves. Their whole purpose was to safeguard a vital interest—the people with whom God was working and the worship system He gave them. God's plan does not center on walls and buildings. It is ever and always about people." [END]

Day 719 – THURSDAY: August 14<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 7:4 through Nehemiah 8

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Despite its spacious size, Jerusalem was still sparsely populated (verse 4). As it had been almost a century since the first return of exiles under Zerubbabel, it would seem that there should have been more people there. Yet the trouble that the city faced over the decades could have driven many families out into the countryside.

Nehemiah's unstated but implicit concern here is the repopulation and development of Jerusalem. We will later see in chapter 11 that his

solution is to direct a portion of those in various parts of the province of Judea to resettle in the capital. Here in [Nehemiah 7:5](#), "Nehemiah attributed to the Lord the idea of a census that would show the distribution of the population. If he knew the population pattern in the capital and the countryside, he could then determine which districts could best afford to lose a portion of their inhabitants to Jerusalem" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 5).

As he pondered the situation, he came across a list of those in the first return under Zerubbabel. It is basically the same as the list recorded earlier in Ezra 2. We covered [Nehemiah 7:5-72](#) in conjunction with that prior passage for sake of comparison. We are reviewing it here because this is where it actually fits in the story. You may wish to look back over the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on the earlier passage for an explanation of some of the variations in names and numbers.

### **Ezra Reads the Law During the Fall Feasts**

Following the arrangement of the book of Nehemiah, the seventh month appears to come just five days after the completion of the city wall (compare [Nehemiah 5:15](#)). However, the year is a matter of dispute, as there are some chronological questions here and throughout the remainder of the book. It could be that the events of chapters 8-10 describe events that occurred much later—following some of Nehemiah's reforms described in chapter 13. Since the matter is uncertain, we are sticking with the scriptural arrangement in our reading of this section of the book.

The first day of the seventh month is one of God's annual Holy Days—the Feast of Trumpets (see [Leviticus 23:23-25](#)). The name of the feast does not occur in Nehemiah 8, but the fact that the first day of the seventh month is a Holy Day is explicitly stated (verses 10-11). This day marked the first day of the civil year and the Jews still refer to it as Rosh Hashanah, "Head of the Year" (the Jewish New Year).

Jews from all over Judea have come to Jerusalem. They gather in the open square between the southeastern part of the temple and the eastern wall (verse 1).

Here, for the first time in the story of Nehemiah, we see the appearance of Ezra. A number of critics maintain that this passage should follow Ezra 10, putting the events it describes long before Nehemiah's arrival (or placing Ezra's arrival long after that of Nehemiah). [Nehemiah 8:9](#), however, shows that Nehemiah was the governor during this episode. The aforementioned critics view his name here as an erroneous editorial gloss. But there is no real warrant for such a conclusion. It is not at all unreasonable to believe the scriptural attestation that Ezra would have still been around 13 or more years after his arrival—that despite Samaritan actions against Jerusalem and the events surrounding the satrap Megabyzus' rebellion probably having swept him from office as governor, he would still have been a respected spiritual leader among the Jews (see also [Nehemiah 12:26](#), [Nehemiah 12:31](#), [Nehemiah 12:36](#)). The widespread idea that Ezra returned long after Nehemiah (during the reign of Artaxerxes II instead of Artaxerxes I) is an untenable one, as it requires the scriptural mentions of the two interacting together to be spurious additions to the text.

Returning to Nehemiah 8, Ezra is called on to read to the people from the Book of the Law of Moses. Exactly what the term *Book of the Law* specifies is debated. Some see it as the entire Pentateuch—the five books of Moses. Others view it as just Deuteronomy. Still others see it as certain sections of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Since Joshua wrote of the Shechem covenant near the end of his life in the Book of the Law (see [Joshua 24:25-26](#)), it seems that the book may have encompassed more than what is written in the Pentateuch. Following Ezra's reading, the history recounted afterward in Nehemiah 9 could argue for understanding the Book of the Law in the broad sense of the



whole Pentateuch and perhaps even more of Scripture. Whatever the case, Ezra reads to the people for five or six hours, as the word translated "morning" in [Nehemiah 8:3](#) actually specifies "dawn" as the starting point. He continues on until about noon, and the people remain attentive.

As the Law is presented, the Levites help the people to understand it (verses 7-8). The wording here is interesting. Rabbinic tradition maintains that the Levites were here translating the less familiar ancient Hebrew into Aramaic, the common language of the people since the exile in Babylon. And perhaps the phrase translated "gave the sense" does have that meaning—along with possibly explaining outdated idioms and other archaic usages. (Indeed, those skeptics who argue that the Mosaic Law was a priestly invention during the time of Ezra should note that this passage seems to show the Law as a very old document even then.) Yet the phrase that follows, "helped them to understand the reading," may well have referred to some expounding on how to apply the principles and lessons contained in the Law.

On hearing the Law, the people sink into weeping—evidently sorrowful over their failure to live up to its demands. Gauging from this reaction, it seems to have been a long time since the Law was read. It could be that the command to read it every seventh year at the Feast of Tabernacles was being followed (see [Deuteronomy 31:9-13](#)) and that it was now seven years since the previous reading. And it may be, if the book is not arranged chronologically, that this whole episode was following the serious lapses of chapter 13, which we will read later.

Though Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites were no doubt glad to see such widespread heartfelt contrition, they nevertheless pointed out the need for the people to strive to refrain from weeping at this time so as to rejoice in God's Holy Day ([Nehemiah 8:9-12](#)). The people are encouraged to indulge in fine food and drink and to share with others in need. If the events of chapter 8 followed the completion of the wall

by only a few days, as the scriptural arrangement would seem to imply, then there would have been a lot of people in need at this time, given that Nehemiah would have only just instituted his economic reforms of chapter 5 within the past two months.

It is wonderful to see the leaders of the people coming again the next day with a desire to learn more of the Law (verse 13). These leaders were likely being given specialized instruction so as to be able to in turn teach those over whom they served. As they listen, the reading comes to Leviticus 23, which mentions dwelling in booths and the gathering of branches as part of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles (verses 40, 42-43; compare [Nehemiah 8:14-15](#)), the term "tabernacles" denoting booths—temporary shelters. Again, this feast is not named in Nehemiah 8 either. It is simply called the "feast of the seventh month" (verse 14) and said to last seven days with a sacred assembly on the eighth day (verse 18; compare [Leviticus 23:33-36](#), [39](#)).

It is surprising to read in [Nehemiah 8:17](#) that the nation had not made temporary shelters and dwelt under them since the time of Joshua. Clearly, the Feast of Tabernacles had been observed in the intervening centuries, such as under Solomon (see [1 Kings 8:65](#); [2 Chronicles 7:9](#)) and even more recently under Zerubbabel (see [Ezra 3:4](#)). How is it, then, that the Israelites had not constructed booths out of branches for more than 900 years even during times of national faithfulness? It could be that many had but that the "whole assembly" (see again [Nehemiah 8:17](#)) had not done so since Joshua's time. Another explanation may be that Leviticus 23 does not explicitly state that the branches are to be used for such construction. It merely states that the people were to gather branches and, mentioned separately, that they were to dwell in temporary dwellings. Perhaps those in intervening centuries understood their temporary housing in Jerusalem as meeting the Feast's requirement or, as Judaism today teaches, that booths could be made with other materials—with the branches simply carried in

worship and used for festival decoration. According to this explanation, the Jews at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah come to see the branches as construction material for the booths and reinstitute a practice not seen since Joshua's day. In any case, it is clear from Jewish tradition that the people at some point began carrying branches about as part of their worship during the festival—as observant Jews still do today.

The Feast in Nehemiah 8 is observed with exuberant gladness, reminiscent of the great joy at the renewal of the Passover under Hezekiah ([2 Chronicles 30:26](#)) and at the revival under Josiah ([2 Kings 23:22](#); [2 Chronicles 35:18](#)). This was a wonderful time, with the Book of the Law being read from each day ([Nehemiah 8:18](#)). Indeed, God's law brings great joy—in understanding the truth, and much more in living by it.

Moreover, there was a rebuilt city wall for which to be thankful. Indeed, whether the fall festivals of chapter 8 came the next month after the completion of the city wall or many years later after its rededication, the chapter arrangement fits thematically either way. The autumn festival period represents the time when Jesus Christ will return to the earth to defend His people, restore them and their land and set up His rule from Jerusalem. There was a small prototype of this in the mission of Nehemiah. Furthermore, when Christ returns He will lead Judah and Israel in spiritual reformation. That too is prefigured in the national turning to God at the reading of His law in Nehemiah 8 and the commitment of the people as related in the next two chapters along with Nehemiah's reforms described later in the book.” [END]

Day 720 – FRIDAY: August 15<sup>th</sup>

Nehemiah 9

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “On the 24th day of the seventh month, two days after the sacred assembly following the Feast of Tabernacles,

the people gather in public fasting and repentance (verses 1-2; compare [Nehemiah 8:18](#)). This was just two weeks after a commanded holy fast day, the Day of Atonement, which the people would have observed on the 10th day of the seventh month, between the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles. For just as the leaders on the second day of the month had read about the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23 (see [Nehemiah 8:13-15](#)), they would also have read about the Day of Atonement at the same time, since it too is described in Leviticus 23 (as well as in Leviticus 16). Perhaps, in learning much more of the Law through the Feast of Tabernacles, the people came to see that they had much more about which to repent. Moreover, the fast on the 24th was preparatory to an official renewal of the covenant relationship with God, as explained in [Nehemiah 9:38](#) and chapter 10. Jesus taught that His followers should fast ([Matthew 9:15](#)), clearly referring to more than just the annual fast of the Day of Atonement (although Christians also continued to observe this commanded fast, as alluded to in [Acts 27:9](#)). Fasting is a way to clear the mind of distractions and give concentrated thought to spiritual matters.

Verse 2 mentions the children of Israel having separated themselves from all foreigners (see also [Nehemiah 10:28](#)). While this could simply refer to the Jews distinguishing themselves from the pagan world around them, some who view chapters 8-10 as falling later in Nehemiah's governorship see the separation as a reference to ending the intermarriage problems described later in the book (see [Nehemiah 10:30](#); [Nehemiah 13:3](#), [Nehemiah 13:23-30](#)). Foreigners were welcomed in Israel, so long as they adopted the worship of the true God and forsook their pagan religions entirely. Circumcision of their males demonstrated their commitment to God ([Exodus 12:43-49](#)). Whatever the case, the intent was to serve as the special, distinct people God intended His nation to be.

On this special fast day, the Book of the Law was read for about three hours, and another three hours were spent in congregational worship ([Nehemiah 9:3](#)).

In verse 5, a group of Levites give a call to praise: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever." Some see these words as the commencement of a psalm that continues to the end of the chapter. Others see them as simply calling for the psalm or poetic prayer that follows, beginning with the words "Blessed be Your glorious name" and then continuing to the end of the chapter. This address to God reviewing His consistent intervention in Israel's history is sometimes referred to as the Levites' Psalm. Yet some refer to it as the Prayer of Ezra—seeing it as his response, perhaps already planned and written out, to the Levites' call to praise. The former seems more likely—that is, that this was all part of what the Levites spoke or sang—since Ezra's name is not mentioned. However, if it were spoken or sung together by the Levites, it had to have been written out ahead of time—and Ezra could certainly have helped with that.

This eloquent psalm recites the faithfulness of God throughout Israel's existence despite the persistent *unfaithfulness* of Israel. The recounting of the history was probably fresh on the minds of the people to whom the Book of the Law had been read over a three-week period. This passage is a testimony not only to God's powerful intervention on behalf of His people, but also of His great mercy and loyalty toward those with whom He had established His covenants. The psalm begins with the glory of God's name and His greatness as the Creator (verses 5-6). It then goes through God's involvement with Israel throughout the nation's history (verses 7-31): the call of Abraham and the promise of Canaan (verses 7-8); the deliverance from Egypt (verses 9-11); the time in the wilderness, including the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and the revelation of the weekly Sabbath (verses 12-21); the conquest of Canaan (verses 22-25); the period of the judges (verses 26-28); and the

succession of prophets during the period of the monarchies of Israel and Judah (verses 29-31). Next we see the nation's subjugation to foreign powers as the righteous judgment of God—the period in which the people still find themselves in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (verses 32-37).

With the example of God's faithfulness so powerfully before them in this historical review, the people commit to emulating His faithfulness through the making of a sure covenant with Him and abiding by it (verse 38). We will read about the sealing of this covenant in the next chapter.” [END]

#### Day 721 – SATURDAY: August 16<sup>th</sup>

##### Nehemiah 10 & 11

##### Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: “It is apparently still the 24th day of the seventh month (see chapters 8-9). Nehemiah lists the signers of the covenant made on this day (see [Nehemiah 9:38](#)). "The way someone 'signed' a document in the ancient world was similar to the use of a wax seal in more recent times. A distinctive seal was pressed into soft clay. The pattern of the seal showed what authority issued that document" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Nehemiah 10:1](#)).

Nehemiah was the first to sign. Verses 2-8 then list the priests who placed their seals on the covenant. "Some of these names appear in a later list as heads of priestly houses ([Nehemiah 12:11-20](#)). Twenty-one priests who were heads of households signed the agreement in the name of the houses and families of their respective classes. Ezra's name does not appear, perhaps indicating that he was not the head of a household" (note on [Nehemiah 10:2-8](#)). It could also be that Ezra wrote the document, serving not as a representative of the people in this covenant but as a mediator between the people and God—perhaps

alongside the high priest Eliashib, whose name does not appear here either.

Seventeen Levites, some of whom later appear as heads of Levitical orders (see [Nehemiah 12:8](#)), also signed ([Nehemiah 10:9-13](#))—as did 44 civil leaders (verses 14-27). As for the rest of the people, though they did not themselves sign, they did agree to the terms of the covenant, which called for a curse on them if they failed to keep their oath of obedience to the Law that God gave through Moses (verses 28-29).

Special mention is given in the covenant to not intermarrying with people from the neighboring nations (verse 30). It could be that this problem was given consideration because of what happened prior to Ezra's governorship (see Ezra 9-10). However, it could also refer to the resurfacing of the problem as later discovered by Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 13:23-30](#)). As was mentioned in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on the previous chapter, the reference to the people having separated themselves from the peoples of the lands in [Nehemiah 10:28](#) (and [Nehemiah 9:2](#)) have led some to conclude that the events of chapters 8-10 occurred much later in Nehemiah's administration than where they fit in arrangement order (compare [Nehemiah 13:3](#)). Yet it could be that this covenant came early in Nehemiah's administration and the problems arose later in spite of it. The biblical record demonstrates time and again that knowing what God wanted them to do was no guarantee that the people would do so.

Another concern addressed in the covenant is the buying of wares and grain—that is, doing one's shopping for the coming days—on the Sabbath ([Nehemiah 10:31](#)). Here again is a very specific problem that Nehemiah later dealt with as governor (see [Nehemiah 13:15-22](#)). Perhaps this was an issue addressed early on in Nehemiah's administration that defiantly returned at a later time. The Sabbath command is appropriately known as the "test commandment" (compare Exodus 16, especially verse 4) because it presents a strong



challenge for people to set aside their normal everyday wants and business in order to worship God. On the other hand, if the chapter arrangement of Nehemiah is not chronological, it could be that the problem occurred late and that this covenant followed it. Since the two problems of intermarriage and Sabbath breaking occur in both contexts, the latter seems a distinct possibility. As *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes on [Nehemiah 10:31](#): "The provisions of vv. 31-34 may have been a code drawn up by Nehemiah to correct the abuses listed in chapter 13 (e.g., vv. 15-22)."

The people also agreed in the covenant to observe the Sabbatical year—that is, in every seventh year they would leave their fields uncultivated (to allow the nutrients in the soil to build up, thereby preventing the depletion of the land) and cancel debts owed them ([Nehemiah 10:31](#); see [Exodus 23:10-11](#); [Leviticus 25:1-7](#); [Deuteronomy 15:1-6](#)).

They further agreed to pay a temple tax of a third of a shekel for the ongoing expense of temple worship services—similar to the half shekel paid by the Israelites in Moses' day for the tabernacle (see [Exodus 30:11-16](#)). *Expositor's* lists a few possible explanations as to "why the offering should be a third rather than a half shekel. (1) Some maintain that the half-shekel of Exodus ([Exodus 30:16](#); [Exodus 38:25-28](#)) was meant as a onetime offering for the construction of the tabernacle and therefore has no bearing on the offering in [Nehemiah 10:32](#). (2) Others argue that the offering was reduced from one-half to one-third because of economic impoverishment. (3) Some argue that the later shekel was based on a heavier standard, thus one-third of the later shekel was equal to one-half of the earlier shekel. That is, the later Babylonian-Persian shekel was twenty-one grams, whereas the former Phoenician shekel was fourteen grams, hence one-third the former was equal to one-half the latter" (note on verse 32).

Verse 34 says that lots were cast to determine who would provide the "wood offering" and in what order. Though no such offering was directly mentioned in the law, it is clear that the perpetually burning altar fire would have required an ongoing supply of wood (compare [Leviticus 6:12-13](#)). "Josephus mentions 'the festival of wood-offering' on the fourteenth day of the fifth month (Ab), when all the people were accustomed to bring wood for the altar (*War[s of the Jews]*, Book 2, chap. 17, sec. 6]...). The Mishnah (*Taanith* 4.5) lists nine times when certain families brought wood" (note on [Nehemiah 10:34](#)).

The covenant further confirms that the people would be faithful in the offering of the firstfruits and firstborn and in the payment of tithes (verses 35-38). The focus of these commitments is brought out well in the last words of the document: "We will not neglect the house of our God" (verse 39). Like Sabbath breaking and intermarriage, failure to provide for the temple and priesthood through tithes and offerings was yet another matter specifically addressed by Nehemiah in chapter 13 (verses 10-14)—lending further support to the possibility that the covenant of chapter 10 was made after the events of chapter 13.

As the "house of our God" today is His Church, we should see in all this a parallel for us. We must all be committed to separating ourselves from the world, obeying God in all areas of our lives and providing for the needs of the Church and the work He has given it to do.

## **The People of Jerusalem and Other Towns of Judea**

In chapter 5, Nehemiah had been concerned with the lack of people living in Jerusalem and a census was taken of the Jews of Judea with that concern in mind. Now we see that this was to provide the groundwork for a redistribution of the population so as to move more people into the capital. Nehemiah's solution was to "tithe" from the outlying areas—directing a tenth of the people from around the country to relocate to Jerusalem.

This was determined by lot ([Nehemiah 10:1](#))—as was the responsibility for the wood offering in the previous chapter ([Nehemiah 10:34](#)). "The casting of lots, small stones or pieces of wood, was viewed by the Jews as a pious way of determining God's will. Thus Nehemiah left the choice of those who should move to Jerusalem up to God. The practice was used in choosing portions of the land to be occupied by the original conquerors of Canaan in Joshua's time" (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader's Companion*, 1991, p. 320).

Yet notice from verse 2 that those who moved did so as a willing offering of themselves. To uproot from family and friends and move to a distant place to forge new friendships and a new life is never an easy thing. Yet, they were willing to move for the sake of serving God, just as people through the ages have done (and still do) to serve God's work and purpose.

Verses 3-24 list various residents of Jerusalem and some of their responsibilities. Verses 25-36 then list people in outlying areas. As in other passages regarding the people of Judea following the Babylonian Exile, we can see here that only two tribes of Israel are represented besides the priests and Levites—Judah and Benjamin. The people of the tribe of Judah dwelt in 17 towns and their surrounding villages. The Benjamites lived in 15 towns. "The limits of the Judean settlement after the return from Babylon have been confirmed by archaeological evidence; none of the YHD-YHWD (the official designation of the Persian province of Judea) coins have been found outside the area demarcated by these verses" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on verses 25-30)." [END]