

Nehemiah

Restoring the Walls and People									
Walls					People				
Chapters 1–7					Chapters 8–13				
Construction					Instruction				
Political					Spiritual				
Return 1–2		Rebuilding 3–7			Renewal 8–10			Reforms 11–13	
Persia Prayer 1	Jerusalem Inspection 2	Dele- gation 3	Opposed/ Finished 4–6	Organ- ized 7	Convic- tion 8	Confes- sion 9	Cove- nant 10	Resettle- ment & Dedication 11–12	Sabbath & Intermarriage Reforms 13
-----52 days (6:15)-----									425 BC? 420 BC?
445-433 BC									13:6a 13:6b

Key Word: Walls

Key Verse: “So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this and all the surrounding nations saw it, our enemies lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God” (Nehemiah 6:15-16).

Summary Statement:

The way the remnant responded to God’s faithful restorations of the walls and people under Nehemiah was diligent service and worship.

Application:

God helping us complete His projects should lead us to further obedience.

Nehemiah

Introduction

- I. **Title** Ezra and Nehemiah originally formed a single book according to Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.8), Jerome (*Preface to the Commentary on Galatians*), and the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a). The Hebrew Bible also has the two books together under the title Ezra Nehemiah (עֶזְרָא נְחֵמְיָהוּ *ezra' nehemeyah*). However, the repetition of Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7 may indicate that the two were originally separate works. Ezra means "help, succour, assistance" (BDB 740d 1) and Nehemiah means "Yahweh comforts" (BDB 637c 3). Once again the names are significant in that Ezra's ministry enabled the Jews to return to the land and consecrate themselves while Nehemiah gave God's comfort through building Jerusalem's protective wall.

II. Authorship

- A. **External Evidence:** The Book of Nehemiah has long been considered as being named after its author and chief character, Nehemiah himself.
- B. **Internal Evidence:** The inspired title of the book reads, "The Words of Nehemiah, Son of Hacaliah" (1:1) and much of the content appears in the first person (1:1–7:5; 12:27–43; 13:2b–31), making it clear that Nehemiah recorded this book. Some believe the third person sections (7:6–12:26; 12:44–13:2a) were written by Ezra since Nehemiah was absent for these events as he was in Babylon during this time (13:6). Nehemiah 7:5–73 is nearly identical to Ezra 2:1–70, but both lists probably were derived from another record of the same period (*TTTB*, 124).

Nothing is known of Nehemiah's childhood, youth, or family background since the account opens with him as an adult serving King Artaxerxes of Persia. The text does reveal that his father's name was Hacaliah (1:1) and he had a brother named Hanani (1:2), but this is of little help as these men and Nehemiah are not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. The "Nehemiah" of Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 7:7 (in 538 BC) must have been another man of the same name as he came to Judah 90 years before the Nehemiah of the book that bears his name (who arrived in 445 BC). What is known of this Nehemiah is his prayerfulness, diligence, intellectual capabilities, emotional maturity, spiritual status, and wisdom shown in the high position of cupbearer granted to him by the king of Persia.

III. Circumstances

- A. **Date:** Nehemiah left Persia in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (2:1; 445 BC) and returned to the king in his thirty-second year (13:6a; 433 BC). "Some time later" he came again to Jerusalem (13:6b), but the specific time is not given. Perhaps it was about 425 BC (*TTTB*, 125) or even 420 BC (Whitcomb, "Chart of Old Testament Kings and Prophets" on pp. 232, 342). This chronology places the writing after 425 BC, perhaps even as late as 400 BC (LaSor, 647). Arguments for later dates based upon stylistic affinities to later Aramaic are unconvincing since the Aramaic of Ezra (of Ezra-Nehemiah) is clearly earlier than that of second century Qumran (LaSor, 648). This dating of approximately 425 BC makes Nehemiah a contemporary of Malachi, which finds support in their common descriptions of post-exilic Judaism.
- B. **Recipients:** The first readers of Nehemiah comprised Jews who had returned from Persia with Ezra three or four decades before, as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the returnees with Zerubbabel about 125 years earlier.
- C. **Occasion:** This story continues from Ezra about 11 years after Ezra's spiritual reforms among the remnant in Jerusalem. However, whereas Ezra helped the spiritual establishment of the new community, Nehemiah gave it physical, geographical, and political stability (LaSor, 655). Before Nehemiah came on the scene (445 BC) the restored remnant had been back in Judea over 90 years (since 538 BC), the temple had been rebuilt (516 BC), and Ezra's reforms had been instituted (458 BC). However, Nehemiah found the walls and gates still in ruins and took it upon himself to see to it that the city was not left unprotected. Nehemiah's faith in God saw him accomplish in 52 days what had not been done in the 93 years since the return under Zerubbabel. Afterwards he wrote this account of how the LORD used him to rebuild the walls in order to encourage the people with God's obvious hand in reestablishing his people in their homeland. This account undoubtedly helped his original readers to see that diligence based on obedient faith can accomplish God's will despite what appears impossible.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Although Esther follows Nehemiah in our English Bibles, Nehemiah actually is later chronologically. Thus it concludes the account of the historical books of the English Bible Old Testament. In the Hebrew canon, the final book is Chronicles, preceded by Nehemiah.
- B. Perhaps no other book of Scripture provides a better depiction of the balance between dependence and diligence, as well as prayer and planning. His prayers are generally short but fervent (cf. 1:5-11; 2:1-4, 19-20; 4:1-6, 7-10, 11-14; 6:9, 14).
- C. One difficulty in reconciling Nehemiah with Ezra concerns the walls themselves. At the beginning of the account, Nehemiah seems surprised that the walls were broken down. Why would this be news to him in 445 BC since the Babylonians had destroyed them much earlier in 586 BC (2 Kings 25:10)? One clue is perhaps that the walls had begun to be rebuilt under Ezra during the reign of Artaxerxes, but the project had been stopped (Ezra 4:12, 21-23). Probably Nehemiah had thought the project was completed (Getz, "Nehemiah," *BKC*, 1:674).
- D. Nehemiah is the only biblical book written mostly in the first person (see Authorship above).

Argument

The Book of Nehemiah continues the account of Ezra and, as they originally formed a single work, has the same theme: the record of the restoration of God's people in the land which serves to encourage the remnant towards covenant obedience, especially in true temple worship. Ezra indicates how the returns of Zerubbabel and Ezra contributed to the establishment of the new covenant community. Nehemiah completes the restoration with the third and final return under Nehemiah to rebuild the walls (Neh 1–7), followed by the restoration of the people (Neh 8–13). The book also includes some very insightful teaching on leadership principles (Neh 1–7), spiritual principles (Neh 8–10), and moral and social principles (Neh 11–13; cf. *TTTB*, 126).

Synthesis

Restoring the walls and people

1–7	Walls
1–2	Return
1	Persia prayer
2	Jerusalem inspection
3–7	Rebuilding
3	Delegation
4:1–6:14	Opposition
6:15–19	Completion
7	Organization
8–13	People
8–10	Covenant renewed
8	Conviction
9	Confession
10	Covenant
11–13	Covenant obeyed
11:1–12:26	Resettlement
12:27–47	Dedication
13	Final reforms

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The way the remnant responded to God's faithful restorations of the walls and people under Nehemiah was diligent service and worship.

I. The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls in the third return under Nehemiah's leadership despite opposition teaches covenant obedience rooted in temple worship (Neh 1–7).

- A. God enabled Nehemiah to prepare to rebuild the wall to reestablish Jerusalem as the center of worship at the temple (Neh 1–2).
 - 1. In Persia, Nehemiah learned of Jerusalem's broken wall and interceded with God and Artaxerxes to rebuild the wall (1:1–2:8; fulfilled Daniel 9:25 in 444 BC).
 - 2. In Jerusalem, Nehemiah prepared to reconstruct the wall by inspecting the project, encouraging the people, and rebuffing his critics (2:9-20).
- B. Nehemiah rebuilt the wall in only 52 days by delegation, frustrating his opposition, and protecting the city so the Jews would feel safe to repopulate it (Neh 3–7).
 - 1. Nehemiah wisely delegated the rebuilding project to workers who constructed the wall near their homes as incentive to do quality work (Neh 3).
 - 2. Nehemiah effectively handled opposition to the project by prayer and standing guard against the enemies (4:1–6:14).
 - a) External opposition came from Sanballat and Tobiah who sought to stop the work by ridicule, threat of attack, and discouragement (Neh 4).
 - b) Internal opposition came from greedy Jews who abused their countrymen in contrast to Nehemiah's selfless service as governor (Neh 5).

Since the people had only been working on the wall for a few weeks, "the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil" (5:11) likely refers to usury (interest) *on a monthly basis*, actually yielding an interest rate of 12% annually. Charging any interest to fellow Israelites clearly violated the Law (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:20-21), even though it was rarely observed. For further study, see E. Neufeld, "The Rate of Interest and the Text of Nehemiah 5.11," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 44 (1953/54): 194-204; R. P. Maloney, "Usury and Restrictions on Interest-Taking in the Ancient Near East," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 1-20. Perhaps the actual interest exceeded 12% since commodities were included as well.

- c) External opposition came from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem who tried compromise, blackmail, treachery, and intimidation by false prophets (6:1-14).
 - 3. Despite internal opposition from Tobiah's relatives, the wall took only 52 days, discouraging the enemies as they saw God clearly at work (6:15-19).
 - 4. Nehemiah organized Jerusalem by posting guards and using the returnee list from century earlier to encourage the Jews to repopulate the city (Neh 7).
- #### II. The restoration of the people through Nehemiah's leadership exhorts covenant renewal and commitment to the temple (Neh 8–13).

- A. The covenant renewal after two days of reading and expositing the Word of God encouraged the remnant to record their covenant obedience (Neh 8–10).
 - 1. Conviction: Ezra's reading of the Pentateuch and Levite exposition urged all to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and begin a revival based on God's Word (Neh 8).

2. Confession: Everyone gathered again 24 days later to fast, listen to the Law of Moses, worship, confess sin, and obey a written covenant (Neh 9).
 3. Covenant: Nehemiah publicized those who agreed to follow the covenant as a written record of the people's commitment to obey (Neh 10).
 - a) A list of the priests, Levites, and leaders of the people who signed the covenant reminded them of their agreement to obey the Law (10:1-27).
 - b) Nehemiah recorded the covenant stipulations of submission to the Word, no intermarriage, Sabbath observance, and financial support (10:28-39).
- B. The covenant was obeyed in resettling Jerusalem, dedicating the walls, and other reforms to commit to the temple and covenant stipulations (Neh 11–13).
1. The people obeyed the plan for 10% of the nation to resettle Jerusalem to protect the city and temple from attack to show their commitment to the temple (11:1–12:26).
 2. The wall dedication by Levites, two choirs, and contributions for the temple service once again show their commitment to God's house (12:27-47).
 3. Nehemiah forbade foreigners from the temple, supported temple workers, corrected Sabbath abuses, and prohibited intermarriage to force covenant faithfulness (Neh 13).

Focusing Your Narrative Idea on Authorial Intent

An Example from Nehemiah 1–2

A Different Approach

Nearly all evangelical commentaries expound the Book of Nehemiah as if it's a manual on effective leadership (see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra-Nehemiah," *EBC*, 4:591; Donald K. Campbell, *Nehemiah: Man in Charge*, 23; Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: A Study in Nehemiah*; Gene A. Getz, "Nehemiah," *BKC*, 1:673-74). I think this emphasis has problems:

1. It is highly questionable that the authorial intent of the Book of Nehemiah is to train readers as better leaders. I feel that it is unlikely that the first readers saw the primary purpose of the book as holding up the man Nehemiah as a model to follow.
2. This perspective places undue attention to the human instrument, Nehemiah himself, rather than on the God who sovereignly led him to accomplish the task (1:5, 9-11; 2:4b, 8b, 12, 18, 20).
3. It puts the stress on *how* the walls of Jerusalem were raised which is but a minor focus. The real emphasis should be *why* the walls needed to be rebuilt (2:17).
4. Ezra and Nehemiah in the Hebrew Bible constitute one book and therefore should share a common theme. Since Ezra is not a manual on leadership then this should not be expected of Nehemiah as well.
5. This view also limits proper application only to those in leadership positions.
6. The leadership view hardly takes into account the historical background and chronology. A careful evaluation of the historical situation and how the book fits into the total plan of God brings the Lord to center-stage as the sovereign, covenant-keeping God (see below).

Exegetical Outline

Prologue

Historical background: About 1500 years earlier God had promised Abraham that he would make his descendants into a great nation possessing the entire land from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18f.). Hundreds of years later God further spoke through Isaiah and many other prophets that a Davidic king called the Messiah would rule Israel in this geographical domain. However, the nation rebelled against the Lord and went into exile as the Law had warned (Deut. 28). The key question looming in the minds of the exiled Jews was whether God would still fulfill his promise of a new nation in Palestine under the Messiah as ruler. Was he still sovereign even though his people were in such distress?

Historical foreground: No doubt people wondered how a Messiah could be offered to the nation if Israel was still in exile. For example, one of the messianic prophecies stated that he would be born in Bethlehem (cf. Micah 5:2, written nearly 200 years earlier). Surely the nation would have to sometime return to its homeland for the Messiah to offer the kingdom—an offer which indeed did occur under Christ (Matt. 10:7) but was rejected. Furthermore, Daniel had recorded only a few years earlier that Artaxerxes' command to rebuild Jerusalem under Nehemiah (444 BC) would begin "seventy sevens" (490 years) of prophetic years in the nation's history (Dan. 9:25). The 69th prophetic year (483rd year) would culminate in the death of Messiah in AD 33 (Dan. 9:26).

The postexilic era testifies to the gracious hand of a sovereign God who had not forgotten his promises, for under Zerubbabel and Ezra a small remnant had returned from Babylon, rebuilt the temple and begun reforms. The building under Nehemiah completes this record with a direct fulfillment of Daniel 9:25. Thus, the account of Ezra-Nehemiah shows that God is indeed the God over all gods (Ezra 1:2), a covenant-keeping God. Likewise, his people need to keep the covenant as well (Yamauchi, *EBC*, 4:590).

Exegetical Idea: The way God sovereignly fulfills his promise to preserve Israel in a restored Jerusalem was through preparing Nehemiah to rebuild the city wall.

- I. The way the sovereign God prepared to restore the covenant city of Jerusalem was through placing upon Nehemiah both the burden and position to be used of God (Neh 1).
 - A. God informed Nehemiah that the covenantal people and city were in shame (1:1-3).
 - B. God moved Nehemiah to see Israel's sin and his promises and ability to restore (1:4-11a).
 - C. God had placed Nehemiah in a prominent position to restore Jerusalem to the stature befitting Jerusalem as the city inhabited by the sovereign LORD (1:11b).
- II. The way the sovereign God prepared to restore Jerusalem was through granting Nehemiah's requests before King Artaxerxes (2:1-8).
- III. The way the sovereign God prepared to restore Jerusalem was by granting Nehemiah honor over the people after his wall inspection despite opposition from the enemies (2:9-20).
 - A. God granted Nehemiah honor before the Persian officials over the opposition (2:9-10).
 - B. God granted Nehemiah honor before the people by being informed of the task (2:11-16).
 - C. God granted Nehemiah honor before the people by reminding them that God was surely in their work despite opposition (2:17-20).

Homiletical Exposition (cyclical inductive form) Title: "Where God guides, God Provides"

Introduction:

1. Sometimes it seems like things happen without any divine purpose to it all (examples).
 2. How we can know that God wills for us to accomplish a certain task (subject)?
 3. When Israel was exiled things looked hopeless. Could the nation once again be completely restored? The Book of Ezra records a partial restoration, but the city walls were still destroyed. Was God still with *them* and still the sovereign Lord? And how can *we* be reminded that God is really sovereign (subject restated)?
- I. God sovereignly *provides both the vision and ability* to do certain ministries.
 - A. God gave Nehemiah both the burden and position to be used in rebuilding the wall (Neh 1).
 - B. God gives us vision and strategic positions to serve him when we are obedient.
 - II. God sovereignly *prepares other key people* as resources to help his people do his tasks.
 - A. God granted Nehemiah's requests before King Artaxerxes (2:1-8).
 - B. God prepares the hearts of others to enable us to do his will too.
 - III. God sovereignly *helps his people gain the respect needed* to accomplish his tasks.
 - A. God gave Nehemiah honor with the Jews after he inspected the walls (2:9-20).
 - B. God gives us the credibility needed to do his will.

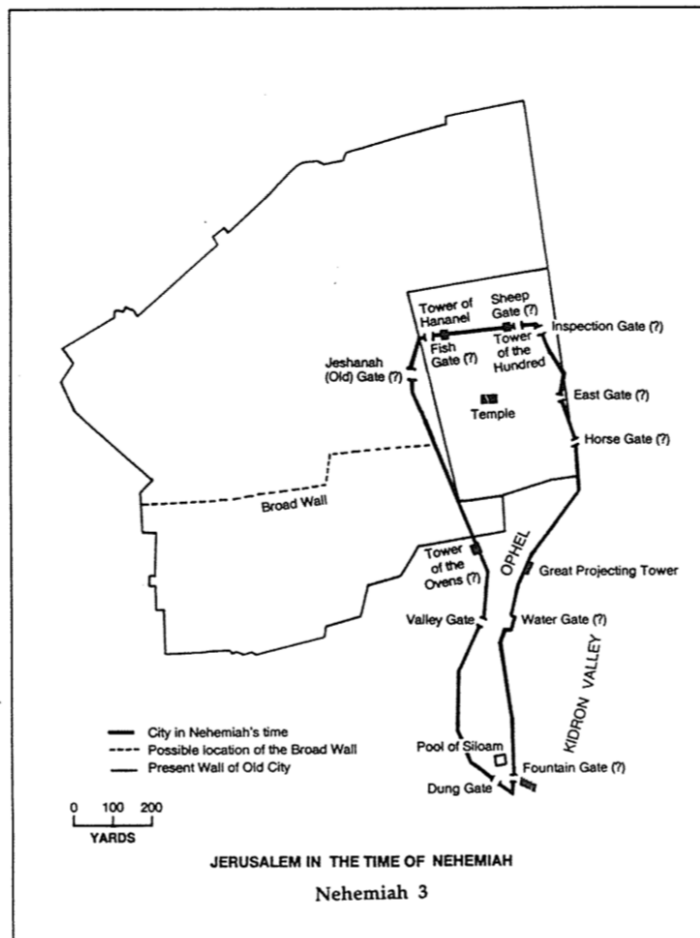
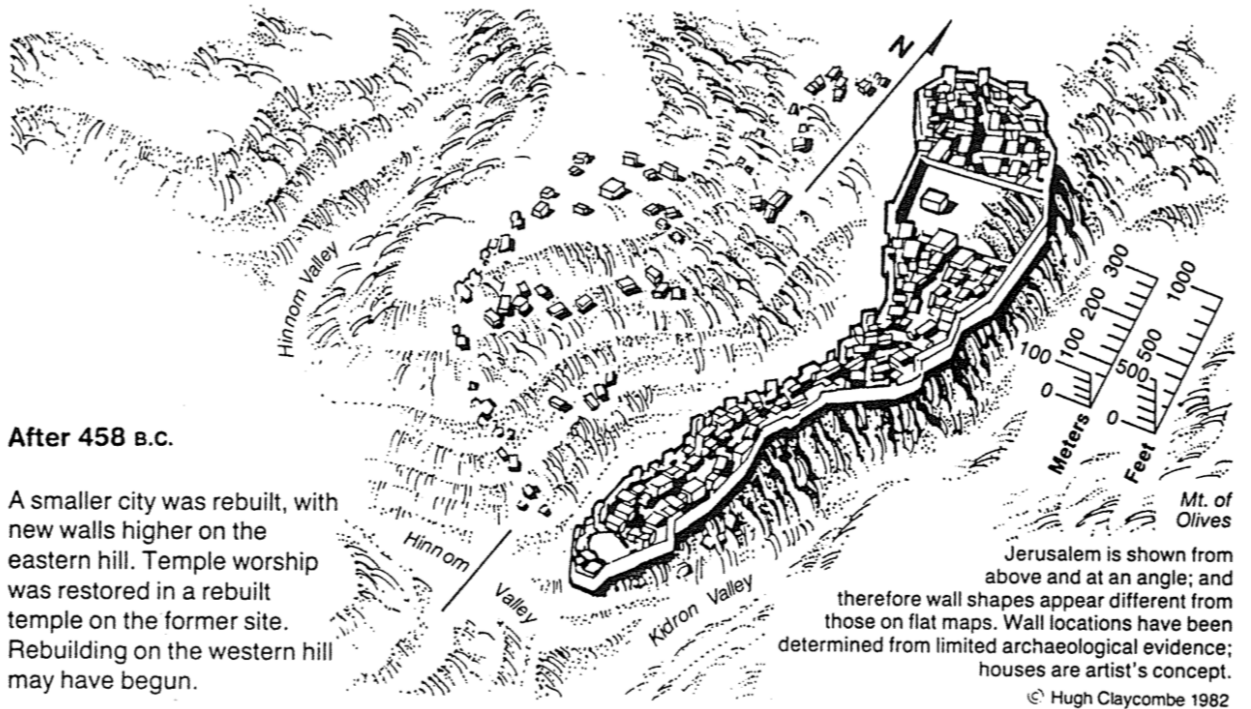
Main Idea: God sovereignly gives us the needed vision, resources, and credibility to do his tasks.

Restatements: Where God guides, God provides! He always equips us to accomplish his will.

Application: What vision, place of influence, resources, and credibility has he given *you*?

Jerusalem of the Returning Exiles

The Bible Visual Resource Book, 99; Gene Getz, "Nehemiah," in Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1:679



Nehemiah's Responses to Problems

Gene Getz, "Nehemiah," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1:681

Nehemiah's Problems and His Responses

Problems

1. Walls broken and gates burned (1:2-3)
2. False accusation of the workers (2:19)
3. Ridicule of the workers (4:1-3)
4. Plot to attack the workers (4:7-8)
5. Physical exhaustion and threat of murder (4:10-12)
6. Economic crisis and greed (5:1-5)
7. Plot to assassinate (or at least harm) Nehemiah (6:1-2)
8. Slander against Nehemiah (6:5-7)
9. Plot to discredit Nehemiah (6:13)
10. Tobiah moved into a temple storeroom (13:4-7)
11. Neglect of temple tithes and offerings (13:10)
12. Violation of the Sabbath by business activities (13:15-16)
13. Mixed marriages (13:23-24)

Responses

1. Grief and *prayer* (1:4), and motivation of the people to rebuild (2:17-18)
2. Confidence that God would give them success (2:20)
3. *Prayer* (4:4-5) and action (greater diligence in the work, 4:6)
4. *Prayer* and action (posting of a guard, 4:9)
5. Positioning of people by families with weapons (4:13, 16-18) and encouragement of the people (4:14, 20)
6. Anger (5:6), reflection, rebuke (5:7), and action (having the people return the debtors' interest, 5:7b-11)
7. Refusal to cooperate (6:3)
8. Denial (6:8) and *prayer* (6:9)
9. Refusal to cooperate (6:11-13) and *prayer* (6:14)
10. Tossing out Tobiah's furniture (13:8)
11. Rebuke (13:11a), stationing the Levites at their posts (13:11b), and *prayer* (13:14)
12. Rebuke (13:17-18), posting of guards (13:19), and *prayer* (13:22)
13. Rebuke (13:25-27), removal of a guilty priest (13:28), and *prayer* (13:29)

Nehemiah's Leadership

Donald K. Campbell, *Nehemiah: Man in Charge*, 23

While leadership is not the main purpose of the book, nevertheless, the man Nehemiah exemplifies many principles for good leadership. Some these include the following:

1. He established a reasonable and attainable goal.
2. He had a sense of mission.
3. He was willing to get involved.
4. He rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
5. He patiently waited for God's timing.
6. He showed respect to his superior.
7. He prayed at crucial times.
8. He made his request with tact and graciousness.
9. He was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
10. He went through proper channels.
11. He took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
12. He investigated the situation firsthand.
13. He informed others only after he knew the size of the problem.
14. He identified himself as one with the people.
15. He set before them a reasonable and attainable goal.
16. He assured them God was in the project.
17. He displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles.
18. He displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles.
19. He did not argue with opponents.
20. He was not discouraged by opposition.
21. He courageously used the authority of his position.

Chronicles Clip #4

C. Zanziper (Reubeni Foundation, Jerusalem)

Chronicles

RUSALEM, 26 TISHRI, 3317
4 B.C.E.)

NEWS OF THE PAST

VOL. 3, NO. 26

Success Crowns Work of Ezra and Nehemiah

NATION PLEDGES ALLEGIANCE TO TORAH; FIRST KNESSET OPENS IN JERUSALEM

REPOPULATION OF JERUSALEM BY DECREE

Chronicles News Service)
As out of every ten families now residing outside Jerusalem will be called to leave its current abode and come to the capital.
The decree to this effect was issued by the Emperor's Office, which announced that lots be cast to determine the step was taken, it explained, in order to solve one of Judah's most serious problems: the removal of the capital, which it has been made from a military point of view, to the city's western hill as under the programme.
The fact that this has not yet been surpassed by a wall.

DEDICATION OF CITY WALL - TOMORROW

(Chronicles News Service)
The dedication of Jerusalem's new wall will take place tomorrow, according to an official announcement from the Governor's Office. The construction of the edifice was completed a month ago, but the dedication ceremony was postponed to allow the Torah Covenant to take precedence.
The work on the wall was performed in the amazingly short time of 52 days, the men toiling practically without a let-up, under the able supervision of their energetic leader, Governor Nehemiah.
In some places the old wall had been completely destroyed, and it was necessary first to remove the debris — an operation that entailed more work than the actual building. But the men were fully aware of the urgency of the work they were doing, and they kept at it until it was finished.
Final Inspection
Late last night Governor Nehemiah once more inspected the wall in its entirety, accompanied, as usual, by his faithful trumpeter.
This time the tour of inspection was completed without a mishap, and not once was it necessary to set off the alarm — those all-too-familiar trumpet blasts that bear tidings of an approaching attack on the city. Three times in the course of the construction the men had to put down their tools and take up arms against bands of marauders that had been sent here by the neighbouring princes to interfere with the work. And then, of course, there were the countless raids on Jerusalem before the wall project was launched.
Our most dangerous enemy has been the Samaritan chieftain, Sanballat, who has not stopped at frontal attacks on Jerusalem but has worked behind (Continued on Page 3, Col. 1)

NEHEMIAH PAYS GLOWING TRIBUTE TO EZRA

(Chronicles News Service)
Governor Nehemiah this morning paid glowing tribute to Ezra the Scribe for the work he had done in preparing the people for this great day.
The Governor's remarks were made in a speech before the assembled masses, in which he empowered the 120 Assemblymen to represent the people of Judah, to legislate for them, and to sign laws and treaties on their behalf. This, said Governor Nehemiah, he did by dint of the authority vested in him by King Artaxerxes of Persia.
Nehemiah stressed the gravity of the hour and warmly praised Ezra, who paved the way for today's achievement through the tremendous job he had performed, over a period of many years, in raising a generation of scribes and teachers to lift the people from the low spiritual level to which they had fallen during the exile years.
'Not Since Moses...'
'Not since the days of Moses ben Amram,' the Governor said, 'has there been such a day as this in the history of our people.' (Continued on Page 2, Col. 2)

Intermarriage Banned; Work on Sabbath Outlawed; Temple Offerings Re-instituted

By a Staff Writer
The nation's leaders — 120 in number — today solemnly placed their signatures on a document, formulated by Ezra the Scribe, which obliges the people of Judah to regulate their lives according to the Torah — the Law of Moses.



GREAT MOMENT: Judah's leaders sign Covenant

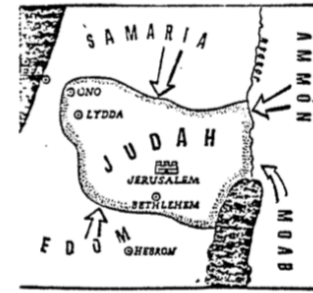
Crowds Cheer Nehemiah For '52-Day Wonder'

By a Staff Writer
At long last, the nation's leaders are beginning to feel the fruits of their labour. Thanks to Governor Nehemiah's untiring efforts, the enemy's attacks on Jerusalem have dwindled to the vanishing point. The capital's brand-new wall, erected in record time (it's being called 'Nehemiah's 52-Day Wonder'), has imbued us with fresh confidence as we face the future.

The main points of the Covenant are the following: (1) Prohibition of mixed marriages; (2) Observance of the Sabbath — binding on all citizens of Judah, including Gentiles; (3) Re-institution of the Sabbatical Year, effecting lands and monetary debts; (4) Re-institution of Temple tithes and offerings.
The historic signing ceremony brought to an end a series of great events that commenced on the first day of the month, when Ezra began reading the Torah, word for word, to the assembled masses.
The reading of the Torah was followed by the Sucoot Festival (15-22 Tishri), which this year was celebrated with unusual fervour. Jerusalem was filled to overflowing with people who had come here to be present at the reading of the Torah and the signing of the Covenant.
Yesterday, on the 25th day of Tishri of the year 3317 of the Creation (142 years after the destruction of the First Temple, and 72 years after the dedication of the Second Temple), Ezra and Nehemiah appointed the Great Assembly (Knesset Gedolah) to represent the people in matters of national legislation.
Today the 120 members of the Assembly, acting on behalf of the people of Judah, signed the Covenant which, in essence, is a pledge of allegiance to the Law of Moses.
The Covenant goes into effect as of now.

Nehemiah Again Puts Off 'Big 4' Meeting at Ono

Special to CHRONICLES
CHEM, 25 Tishri.—From Samaritan sources it is learned that Governor Nehemiah of Judah has again defied the invitation of Sanballat, head of the sect of Samaria, to come to the village of Ono, on the Judaean-Samaritan border, for a conference of the 'Big 4' of the area: Gashmu, leader of the Edomites, Ahaz, leader of the Ammonites, Sanballat, and Meshai.



Used in on all sides, Judah fights for her existence

Sanballat issued an announcement today in which he sharply criticized Nehemiah for his repeated refusal to appear at such a meeting — the purpose of which, according to Sanballat, is 'simply to adjust relations among these nations and bring about peace in the area.'
Fourth Call
The Samaritan leader said that this is the first time that Nehemiah asked for a postponement of the conference on grounds that he is busy; despite the fact that the place designated for the meeting is no more than four and a half hours' ride from Jerusalem.
The responsibility for the delay, he said, may rest upon you. (See Page 2, Col. 2)

Chanani to Head Defence Set-Up

(Chronicles News Service)
Chanani, brother of Governor Nehemiah, has been placed in charge of all matters relating to the defence of Jerusalem.
Chanani is a veteran resident of Jerusalem, having come here with Ezra 13 years ago. It was he whom Ezra dispatched to Persia in order to inform Nehemiah, then living in Shushan, of the gravity of Jerusalem's position.
His assistant will be Chanani's brother, Meshai.

Governor Calls For Annulment of Debts

By a Staff Writer
A few hours after the Covenant ceremony, Governor Nehemiah convened the officials and big landowners of Judah and called upon them to join with him in announcing the immediate cancellation of all outstanding debts.
The economic situation of most of Judah's farmers is extremely grave this year, the Governor explained, because of the drought and the hostile activities of the Edomites and other neighbouring tribes.
In addition, many farmers have been conscripted in recent months, along with artisans, tradesmen, and men from other walks of life, to help build Jerusalem's new wall, and this has aggravated their situation, causing hardship and suffering to their families.
There is hardly a farmer in Judah who has not been forced into debt; the Governor himself has made loans to dozens of needy families. In numerous cases, where the sum involved was high, one or more members of the family have been seized and held in servitude by the creditors, as surety for the debt.
In other cases, fields, orchards, and vineyards were confiscated — thus crippling the debtor's capacity to earn and often compelling him to go into slavery himself.
To set an example to the others, Governor Nehemiah declared on the spot that he was nullifying all debts due him. He called on his listeners to do likewise and to return the collateral, where such had been taken.
The Governor's proposal caused quite a stir among those present, and the onlooker had the impression that there would be a good deal of opposition. But when Nehemiah called for pledges, the response was favourable. All agreed to comply with the debt-cancellation programme. At least — none openly disagreed.
Privately, however, several of those who had been invited to hear the Governor's proposal expressed their disapproval. It is to be doubted, therefore, that the proposal will be fully implemented.

Capital's Gates to Close on Sabbath

In keeping with the signing of the Torah Covenant and the acceptance by the people of the Law of Moses as binding on the nation as a whole, Governor Nehemiah today issued instructions to close all the city's gates at sundown on Friday and to post sentries at the gates to prevent merchants and traders from entering Jerusalem and transacting business on the Sabbath day.
It will be recalled that Nehemiah lashed out recently at the Jewish landowners who insist on sending their produce into Jerusalem on this day of rest, using the hire-services of non-Jews to perform this forbidden work for them.
From now on, the Sabbath law will apply to the entire nation — Jews and non-Jews alike. (See Tishri Topics, on Page 2)

COMPOSITION OF FIRST KNESSET

Table listing the composition of the First Knesset: Signatories to the Torah Compact, members of the new Knesset, categorized into groups like Priests, Levites, Family Heads, Writers, Prophets, etc.

'30-Year Peace' in Jeopardy As Athens-Sparta Rift Widens

By Our Correspondent
ATHENS.— Only one year has passed since the signing of the 'Thirty Years' Peace' between the Delian League headed by Athens and the Peloponnesian League headed by Sparta. Yet already there is growing tension in the relations between the two sides, and it is feared that hostilities may be renewed long before the term of the peace pact has expired.
Sparta is carrying on an intensive campaign of incitement against Athens, charging that the Athenian leader, General Pericles, has been strengthening his naval forces with a view to resuming the war and extending the rule of Athens to all of Hellas.
As proof of this contention, the Spartans cite Pericles' recent speeches, in which he has constantly stressed the importance to Athens of her navy.
In his last speech, the General went so far as to make the following statement:
'In time of war, retreats and temporary losses of territory may be necessary in order to enable us to concentrate our forces on the home front — Athens herself — and on the sea. It is imperative that Athens maintain her naval supremacy over her enemies.'