

Nehemiah

<CHAPTER 1>

1 Nehemiah Hears News of Jerusalem 1:1 - 11

A. The News 1:1 - 4

¹ The chronicle of Nehemiah ¹ the son of Hacaliah:

In the month of Chislev ² in the twentieth year ³ as I was in the citadel Susa, ⁴ ² one of my fellow Jews, Hanania, arrived along with ⁵ some men of Judah and I inquired about the surviving remnant of the Jews who had escaped ⁶ exile, ⁷ and about Jerusalem. ³ They replied, "The survivors of the exile who are in the province, ⁸ are experiencing great disaster ⁹ and humiliation (*or, disgrace*); the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are gutted by fire. ¹⁰

⁵ When I heard these words ¹¹ I sat down and wept, mourning for some time, and I continually fasted and prayed to the God of heaven.

B. Nehemiah's Prayer 1:5 - 11a

⁵ I said, "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome (*or, awe inspiring*) God, who preserves his covenant with loving kindness for those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ listen attentively, and be watchful ¹² for the prayer of your servant which I pray in your presence each day and night on behalf of the people of Israel, confessing ¹³ the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Yes, my ancestral family and I have sinned. ⁷ We have acted very perversely against you and have not kept your commandments, your statutes and your ordinances which you commanded your servant Moses. ¹⁴ ⁸ Remember ¹⁵ the word of warning which you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; ⁹ but if you return to me and keep my commandments and practice doing them, though outcasts under the farthest skies, I will gather them ¹⁶ and bring them to the place which I have chosen to make my name dwell.' ¹⁷ ¹⁰ These are your servants and your people whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your powerful hand. ¹⁸ ¹¹ O Lord, be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and the prayer of your servants who delight in revering ¹⁹ your name. Give success today and grant mercy

1 The name means "The Lord has comforted."

2 The 9th Babylonian month. December/January.

3 This implies during the reign of Artaxerxes I (Longimanus 464 - 423 BCE.) Possibly mid-November/ mid-December of 446 BCE. In chapter 2 the approach to the king is possibly March/April 445 BCE.

4 The capital of Elam, the winter residence of the Persian king.

5 Literally: "he and came."

6 Hebrew: *happel eta*.

7 Exile was considered to be a great shame for the Jewish people.

8 I.e. The province of Trans-Euphrates.

9 Literally: "great evil." Cf. Josephus *Antiquities* XI: 5 - 6.

10 Cf. Josephus *Antiquities* 11: 159 - 164. This took place ca. 586 BCE.

11 "These things" would be a suitable translation of the Hebrew words.

12 Hebrew: "let your ear be attentive and keep your eyes open to hear..."

13 Some MT & LXX manuscripts have "we have sinned."

14 Cf. Deuteronomy 6:1 - 4.

15 MT adds "today."

16 One LXX MSS, Vulgate & Peshitta: "you."

17 Cf. also: Leviticus 26:11 - 33; Deuteronomy 30:1 - 5.

18 Nehemiah comes to God empty handed - but not uninvited.

19 Nehemiah uses the Hebrew word for "to revere" 14 times. The older translators used the word "fear" implying "awe."

in the sight of this man."

II. Nehemiah's Petition is Granted 1:11b - 3:8

At this time I was the cup bearer (*or, wine steward*)²⁰ to the king.

<CHAPTER 2>

¹ In the month of Nisan ²¹ in the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes, I was in charge of serving him wine. Now I had never been depressed (*or gloomy*)²² in his presence. ² The king said to me, "Why are you depressed? Are you ill?"²³ This must be because of inner personal grief."²⁴ Then I was seized with terrible fear. ³ My reply to the king was, "Long live the king! How can I help being depressed when the city in which my ancestor's graves are lying in ruins and its gates have been gutted by fire?" ⁴ Then the king said, "What is your request?" I prayed to the God of heaven ⁵ and answered the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, grant that I be sent to Judah, to the city of my ancestor's graves, that I might rebuild it." ⁶ (The queen (*or, royal consort*)²⁵ was seated next to the king.) The king said,²⁶ "How long will your journey take? When will you return?" So it was acceptable to the king to send me, after I gave him a date for my return (*or, after I proposed a time limit*). ⁷ Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let me have letters for the governors of the province of Trans-Euphrates, that they may allow me to pass through safely until I reach Judah. ⁸ Additionally, also a letter to Asaph, the king's forester, that he might provide timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple²⁷ and for the city wall as well as for a house into which I would enter." The king gave me all that I asked because of the favor of my God toward me.

III. Nehemiah, Governor of Judea 2:9 - 20

A. Arrival in Trans-Euphrates 2:9 - 11a

⁹ When I came to the governor of the province of Trans-Euphrates I gave him the king's letters. Now the king had army officers ²⁸ along with cavalry accompany me.

¹⁰ However, when Sanballat²⁹ the Horonite³⁰ and Tobiah³¹ the Ammonite official,³² heard it they were indignant (*or, greatly distressed*) that someone should come who intended to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

20 A high position in the king's household. He had to taste the wine to demonstrate that it was not poisoned. LXX B says Nehemiah is a eunuch instead of a cup bearer.

21 March/April.

22 Literally: "and I had not been bad (unhappy) before him." Some scholars translate the Hebrew word as "bad." LXX adds "in his face." Vulgate: "There was no one else in his presence."

23 Literally: "Why is your face so bad" or possibly "You must be in a bad mood."

24 Literally: "sadness (badness) of the heart."

25 The word literally, is Biblical Aramaic *segul* meaning "concubine." LXX: "concubine." So also ICC. Talmud: "queen." The Talmud says her name was Damaspi.

26 LXX & several MT MSS have "The queen spoke sympathetically to Nehemiah" which would possibly cause her to influence the king to come to Nehemiah's assistance. There was a witness to Nehemiah's request of the king, which was no doubt important.

27 Hebrew unclear. Possibly: "for the gates of the fortress which is near the temple." TAN: "to give me timber for roofing the gate house of the temple fortress." Does the sentence mean: 1. A fortress for the protection of the temple? 2. A fortress for the protection of the city? Possibly the Tower of Hananil 3:1.

28 Literally: "Officers of the army and cavalry."

29 Cf. Elephantine Papyri which mention Delaga and Shelemejah, the son of Sanballat, the governor. A document written 38 years after this event calls Sanballat the governor of Samaria. Cf. ANET. The date is ca. 492 BCE.

30 Possibly there was a link between Sanballat and Beth Horon in the original tribal land of Ephraim.

31 Perhaps = *tabe-el* Cf. Ezra 4:7. The name means "the Lord is good."

32 Cf. the Zenon Papyri for interesting insights.

B. Inspection of the City Wall 2:11b - 15

After I arrived in Jerusalem and had been there three days, I rose at night, along with a few men who accompanied me, telling no one what my God had prompted me to do³³ in Jerusalem. There was no additional animal³⁴ with me other than the one on which I rode. ¹³ By night I went through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal's Well and the Dung Gate.³⁵ I inspected the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down and its gates which had been ravaged by fire. ¹⁴ I then proceeded to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool;³⁶ but there was no room for the animal I was riding to pass through in order to continue. ¹⁵ I then went up via the valley (*or, wadi*)³⁷ and surveyed the wall and then turned back, returning through the Valley Gate.

C/ Nehemiah's Announcement to the Leaders 2:16 - 18

¹⁶ The officials knew nothing about where I had gone or what I was doing since I had not divulged it to the Jews, the Priests, nobles, magistrates or any others that were to do the work. ¹⁷ then I told them, "You see the wretched situation we are in, while Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come! Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be in disgrace." ¹⁸ I told them of the favor shown me by God who was with me to move me to do good.³⁸ and also about the words which the king had said to me. They responded, "Let the building begin!" They were encouraged³⁹ by God's benevolence

D. Conflict with Neighboring Officials 2:19 - 20

¹⁹ When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab⁴⁰ heard about it they mocked⁴¹ us and showing their contempt and saying to us, "What are you busy doing? Are you committing treason against the king?"⁴² ²⁰ Then I replied to them "The God of heaven will bring about success for we are his servants and will undertake the building. You have no legal share⁴³ or claim or tradition in Jerusalem."⁴⁴

33 Literally: "put in my heart."

34 I.e. domestic animal. *behemu* an ass or horse. No doubt an ass which would be more quiet. It does not snort the way a horse might.

35 The exact route has been debated by scholars for years. What was the extent of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time? If this could be determined exactly the route could be reconstructed with ease. "Valley Gate" in Hebrew could be "valley gap." "Jackal's Well" could be translated as "Dragon's Well" since the Hebrew word *ain hmin* can be translated as "jackal" or "the devourer" which has been felt by scholars to mean "dragon." Other scholars feel the root word is one meaning "royal" and other scholars feel it means "sylvan." Dung Gate is perhaps the same gate as "Potshard Gate" in Jeremiah 19:2. Literally it could be translated as "gate of ash heaps."

36 Fountain Gate literally is "Gate of the Spring."

37 Presumably on foot.

38 Literally: "I told them about the hand of God which was good to me."

39 The Hebrew word seems to mean "to make the hands fast." It is possibly derived from a root word in Akkadian. NRSV "so they committed themselves to the common good."

40 A new opponent. The name appears on a dedicatory bowl of the Persian period, found in 1947 at Tell el Maskhuta in Lower Egypt.

41 The word could properly be translated as "irreligiously derided."

42 The main opposition came from hereditary nobility, public officials and priests who were allied to Sanballat and Tobiah either by marriage or common interest. 6:17 - 19; 13:4 - 9, 28. Others feared their positions would be threatened because of Nehemiah's reforms. 5:6 - 13; 13:20 - 11, 17.

43 Hebrew: *heleg*.

44 There is no possibility for Sanballat or Tobiah making a claim on property in Jerusalem. Legally or traditionally. MFT: "no property, no right, no memorial." There are no grounds for claims of legal ownership based on history .

<CHAPTER 3>

A. Workers on the wall 3:1 - 32

1. The North wall 3:1 - 5⁴⁵

1 Then the high priest Eliashib along with his priestly colleagues⁴⁶ rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They constructed⁴⁷ it and consecrated its door, [consecrating it as well as the wall]⁴⁸ as far as the Tower of the Hundred,⁴⁹ (even as far as the Tower of Hananel). 2 Next to Eliashib the men of Jericho built and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri⁵⁰ built.

3 The people of Hassenaah⁵¹ rebuilt the Fish Gate;⁵² they laid its beams and hung its doors, locks and bars. 4 Next to them Meremoth, the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired. Next to him Meshullam, the son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel repaired. Next to him Zadok⁵³ the son of Baana made repairs.⁵⁴ 5 Next to him the Tekoites⁵⁵ made repairs. However their nobles refused to do physical labor [for their Lord].⁵⁶

2. The West Wall 3:6 - 12

6 Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate:⁵⁷ They laid its beams (*or, they roofed it*) and hung the doors, and installed the bolts and bars. 7 Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite repaired [*along with*] the men of Gibeon⁵⁸ and of Mizpah,⁵⁹ the latter being under the jurisdiction of (*or, belonging to*) the governor of the province of Trans-Euphrates.⁶⁰ 8 Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, from the goldsmiths guild⁶¹ repaired.

45 Based on this chapter it is believed that the rebuilding of the city wall began at the middle of the north side and proceeded counter clockwise around the city. It is impossible to accurately identify all the landmarks that are mentioned in chapter 3.

46 Literally: "its brethren the priests."

47 NEB: emends to read "laid its beams." The Sheep Gate is thought to be at the North East corner of the city.

48 Is the Hebrew word used here for "consecrating it" dittography? Did Eliashib the High Priest begin the work with a consecration service? Was there a second consecration service once the work on the gate was completed. The Hebrew is unclear concerning this. Emended it might read "timbered (*or, built*)." This would be a logical emendation.

49 The Vulgate considers this as a dimension. 100 cubits or 150 feet. Possibly it has a military significance: a unit of 100. In that day officers were over 1000 soldiers as a single unit.

50 The name is an abbreviation of the name Amariah.

51 The LXX and Peshitta have "Senaah."

52 Some scholars feel this was to be identified as the Middle Gate of the North Wall. The Phoenicians controlled the sale of fish in Jerusalem.

53 An abbreviation of Zedekiah or Jehozadek.

54 Literally: "made strong." LXX & Peshitta: "strengthened, fortified."

55 From Tekoa, modern Toqu, 4 miles south of Jerusalem. Cf. Amos 1:1. It is thought to have been a kind of secondary capitol of the district at that time.

56 Literally: "did not put their necks to the work" An agricultural figure of speech. An ox pressing against its yoke in an effort of moving a load. In the present day we might express the Hebrew as "put their shoulders to the wheel." Vulgate & LXX add "the Lord." Is this an example of petty pride or is it half-heartedness?

57 Literally: "gate of the old." Possibly "the gate of the old city." Vulgate & Peshitta: "the old gate." The LXX transliterates the Hebrew as "Jeshanah Gate," making it a proper name. Some scholars identify this gate as the "Gate of Ephraim. JB: "the new quarter" A footnote also identifies it as "the Gate of Ephraim." Cf. Nehemiah 12:39

58 Now a mound near modern El Jib 6 miles east of Jerusalem.

59 Present day Tell en-Nasheh.

60 Literally: "belonging to the throne of the governor of Across the River (*or, Trans-Euphrates*)."

61 Literally: "smelters refiners." Possibly the head of the goldsmiths guild.

⁶² Next to him Hananiah, one of the members of the perfumers guild repaired. ⁶³ They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. ⁶⁴ ⁹ Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, supervisor ⁶⁵ of the district ⁶⁶ of Jerusalem repaired. ¹⁰ Next to him Jedaiah the son of Harumaph ⁶⁷ repaired in front of his own house and next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah repaired. ¹¹ Malchijah to son of Harim and Hasshub to son of Pahath-moab repaired a second section including the Tower of the Ovens. ⁶⁸ ¹² Next to them Shallum the son of Hallohesh, supervisor (*or, foreman*) ⁶⁹ of the district of Jerusalem made repairs. The work was accomplished with the help of his daughters. ⁷⁰

3. The South Wall 3:13 - 14

¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. ⁷¹ They rebuilt it and set up its doors, locks and bars. Additionally they repaired one thousand cubits ⁷² of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate. ⁷³

¹⁴ Malchijah the son of Rechab ⁷⁴ chief of the district ⁷⁵ of Berth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He also rebuilt its doors, bolts and bars.

4. The East Wall 3:15 - 31

¹⁵ Shallum ⁷⁶ the son of Colhozeh, supervisor of the Mizpah district, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and roofed it ⁷⁷ and hung its doors, bolts and bars, as well as the retaining wall of the Pool of Shelah, ⁷⁸ a part of the king's garden, as far as the steps which go down from the city of David. ¹⁶ After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the supervisor of half of the district of Bethzur, ⁷⁹ repaired to a point in front of the tomb of David, to the artificial pool and as far as the House of the Warriors. ⁸⁰ ¹⁷ Next to him the Levites repaired: Rehum the son of Bani, ⁸¹ and next to him

⁶² Interestingly the root word means "restored." Another root word with the same consonants means "abandon." Years ago scholars assumed it to be the latter root word. More recently scholars have determined that these are separate root words.

Apparently there is also a root word "ab" meaning "to set" in Ugaritic. This might be the source of the word in question.

⁶³ LXX "mixers of ointments." Possibly the head of the perfumers guild.

⁶⁴ NAB: "the public square."

⁶⁵ Hur is an Akkadian name meaning "child." A common name in the Persian period. "Supervisor" is generally translated as "Prince" in other parts of Hebrew Scriptures.

⁶⁶ Hebrew: "spindle." i.e. the center of the area over which he has control. Possibly: "foreman of half the portion assigned to Jerusalem."

⁶⁷ The name means "flat nose" which is possibly a nickname.

⁶⁸ I.e. the bakers ovens, not smelters kilns. JB inaccurately translates "the Tower of the Furnaces."

⁶⁹ Cf. footnote 65 above.

⁷⁰ This is one of several points in Hebrew Scripture where 'non-sexist language' misses what seemed by the chronicler to be important. One can assume that large portions of the wall were certainly worked on by women. Ackroyd has suggested that 'daughters' means villages around the 'mother city.' These girls surely deserve recognition!

⁷¹ MFT: "Gai Gate."

⁷² Ca. 1500 feet.

⁷³ Literally: "Gate of refuse heaps." Some scholars feel this is a scribal error. Some scholars emend to read *ha'aspot* for *sa'ar hosepot* thus reading "curds, cheese and cheese maker's gate." Cf. Josephus War 5: 140. It seems clear that Dung Gate is intended. To emend, as Rudolf says, 'eine verschoenernde Korrektur.'

⁷⁴ Possibly a remote ancestor of the Rechabites. II Kings 10:15, 23.

⁷⁵ Cf. footnote 65 above.

⁷⁶ A few Hebrew MSS & LXX B, A, have "Shallun." No doubt a scribal error.

⁷⁷ A hapax legomenon. *wital elennu*.

⁷⁸ Possibly this is the 'Pool of Siloam' mentioned in the New Testament.

⁷⁹ Khirbet - el- Tubuqeh, 4 miles north of Hebron.

⁸⁰ Literally: "House of the mighty men." Possibly a reference to barracks.

⁸¹ Without a doubt not the person referred to in Ezra 2:10.

Hashabiah who was the supervisor over half the district of Keilah.⁸² 18 Next their brothers repaired: Binnui⁸³ the son of Henadad, the supervisor over half the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, supervisor over Mizpah, who repaired a second section⁸⁴ facing the ascent to the Armory⁸⁵ at the angle [*of the wall*]. 20 After him⁸⁶ Baruch the son of Zabbai⁸⁷ repaired a second section from the Angle to the door of the house of Eliashib⁸⁸ the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth the son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz repaired a second section from the entrance to the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22 After him the priests who inhabited the Jordan Valley⁸⁹ made repairs. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired in front of their house.⁹⁰ After them Azariah the son of Masseiah, son of Ananiah repaired beside his own house. 24 Then came Binnui the son of Henadad who repaired the second portion, from the house of Azariah to the escarpment and the corner. 25 Palal the son of Uzai repaired facing the angle and the tower projecting⁹¹ from the royal palace at the courtyard of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh did the repairing. 16 (The temple servants were living in a portion of the city called Ophel. These made repairs as far as a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the Jutting Tower.)⁹² 27 After him the Tekoites⁹³ repaired a second section⁹⁴ opposite the Jutting Tower, as far as the Wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate the priests made repairs, each one making the repairs opposite his own house. 29 The next was Zadok the son of Immer who repaired opposite his own house. Then came Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah the keeper of the East Gate who made repairs. 30 After him⁹⁵ Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son⁹⁶ of Zalaph made repairs to a portion of the wall. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs in front of his living quarters.⁹⁷ 31 After him Malchiah, one of the goldsmiths made repairs, as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, facing the Muster⁹⁸ Gate,⁹⁹ and to the Loft (*or, Upper*) Chamber of the corner.

5, *Remainder of the Wall* 3:32

32 Between the Loft (*or, Upper*) Chamber¹⁰⁰ of the Corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths guild¹⁰¹ and the merchants guild repaired.

82 Cf. I Samuel 23:1 - 13.

83 So: LXX, Syriac. Hebrew: "Bnuuai."

84 Literally: "a second measure."

85 Hebrew obscure. So: emended. MT root word: "to bring into close contact" as "to kiss."

86 At this point the Hebrew inserts a word *hhrh* which is possible dittography after the word *hhrl*. LXX inserts a gloss: "to his mountain."

87 Possibly *Zakkai*. Several MSS & Syriac, Vulgate have *Zakkai*.

88 There is a disagreement among scholars about the spelling of the name.

89 Literally: *kikkar* usually means plain but refers to the Jordan Valley. Peshitta: "men of the plain." Vulgate: "men of the plain of Jordan."

90 These men apparently lived together.

91 MT obscure. Literally: "the ore going out."

92 Possibly a gloss. Cf. v. 27.

93 The Tekoites do double duty. Cf. v. 5.

94 Literally: "a second." There are 6 mentions of double work. Vss 11, 19 -21, 24 & 30.

95 MT has "me."

96 An unusual reference. Perhaps a textual corruption of a marginal note correcting Telemiah to Shelemiah.

97 The Hebrew word can mean either "dwelling" or "storehouse." Vulgate and LXX translate "treasury."

98 LXX takes the word as a name: "Hammephsad Gate." GNB: "Miphhad Gate." JB: "Watch Gate."

99 At this point there is a marginal Masoretic note: "half the book" indicating that it was felt by the Masoretes that Ezra/Nehemiah formed a single work.

100 LXX & Peshitta have "the going up."

101 Reading *ben-hassorpim* for *ben-hasurpi*.

<CHAPTER 4>

B. Reaction to the Judeans' Neighbors 4:1 - 3 [H. 3:33 - 35]

¹ H 3:33 After Sanballat heard that we were in the process of restoring (*or, rebuilding*) the wall, he became very angry, greatly incensed, and he mocked ¹⁰² the Jews. ² [3:34] ¹⁰³ In the presence of his associates and the malitia ¹⁰⁴ of the Samaritans he said, "What are these miserable Jews doing? ¹⁰⁵ Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish the work in a day (*or, Have they any idea of the job they are undertaking*)? Will they retrieve ¹⁰⁶ the stones from the rubbish heaps -- ¹⁰⁷ burned ones at that?" ³ [H3:35] Tobiah the Ammonite was at his side and said, "That stone wall they are building -- if a fox jumped on it, ¹⁰⁸ it would collapse." ¹⁰⁹

C. Nehemiah's Imprecation 4:4 - 5 [H 3:36 - 37]

⁴ [H 3:36] O God, hear how despised (*or, scorned*) we are! Turn their taunt ¹¹⁰ on their own heads and give them over as plunder ¹¹¹ in a land wherein they are captives. ⁵ [H3:27] Do not forgive their guilt, ¹¹² Do not remove (*or, forgive, obliterate*) their sin ¹¹³ from their ¹¹⁴ sight, for they have provoked you to anger ¹¹⁵ before ¹¹⁶ their builders. ¹¹⁷

D. Further Progress in Construction of the Wall 4:6 [H. 3:38]

⁶ [H. 3:38] We built the wall; and all ¹¹⁸ of the wall was continuous to half ¹¹⁹ of its full height. This was accomplished since the people were united and eager to work (*or, it was half finished and all the people were working*). ¹²⁰

102 NICOT "heaped scorn."

103 The text of verse 2 is probably corrupt. It has perplexed translators both ancient and modern.

104 Hebrew: *hel someron*. "power, force, army." Possibly by "force and power."

105 Scholars assume Sanballat gave a serious assessment of the situation. Tobiah added this ridicule. "Associates" indicates that they were allies. LXX, Vulgate & Peshitta: "feeble Jews," giving the implication that they will abandon their project. The root word is the word "to wither (as a plant might wither)." A possible translation with a slight emendation would be: "Will they leave it all to God?"

106 Hebrew uncertain.

107 Literally: "heaps of dust."

108 The Hebrew word might be "fox" or "jackal." Literally "jumps up" is "go up."

109 In other places where this Hebrew word is used it describe "to breach the wall." Here it no doubt means to dig through, causing it to collapse.

110 "*herpa*" = "taunt, scorn, ridicule, sneer, insult, reproach."

111 LXX: "scorn." Hebrew: *bizza* = "contempt, shame, plunder." BDB: "booty, prey, spoils" There is a play on words in this sentence when read in Hebrew. They despise --they should become despised. Is this possibly the song of weary builders, as they toil with building the wall?

112 Literally: "hide their deviation from the right path."

113 Literally: "wipe out their missing the mark."

114 NRSV: "your."

115 Literally: "offended against." NEB: "For they have hurled insults in the face of the builders." Vulgate: "They mocked the builders." Peshitta: "because they were furious against the builders."

116 Omitted by the Vulgate.

117 A possible translation might be: "they have caused you to become angry your anger before the builders." Nehemiah looked to God, not to himself for vindication. This is a classic example of what Von Rad calls the remembrance motif. Gedächtnismotiv.

118 Omitted in the Peshitta.

119 Literally: "up to its half" or "to its middle" [height and width].

120 Literally: "and the heart of the people was to do the work." Opposition is defeated when the willing work! One is reminded of the medieval monks: "Ora et labora."

F. Conspiriacy Against Jerusalem 4:7 - 12 [H. 4:1 - 6]

7 [H4:1] When Sanballat and Tobiah, the Arabs,¹²¹ the Ammonites,¹²² and the Ashdondites¹²³ heard that the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and the gaps were being filled; they were extremely angry.¹²⁴ 8 [H3:2] All of them conspired to go to fight against Jerusalem and create havoc¹²⁵ in it.¹²⁶ 9 [H 4:3] So we prayed to our God, and posted a watch as a protection against¹²⁷ them, day and night. 10 [H4:4] The people of Judah had a song they sang. It was said (*or, sung*) in Judah,

"The strength of the carriers is failing,
yet there is much rubbish;
So we, ourselves are not able
to rebuild the wall alone.
(*or, We grow weak carrying burdens
there is so much rubble to take away!
How can we build the wall today?*)"¹²⁸

11 [H 4:5] Meanwhile our enemies¹²⁹ said, "Before they are aware of it we will stage a surprise attack¹³⁰ and kill them, putting a halt to their work. 12 [H. 4:6]¹³¹ When the Jews who lived near by came and repeatedly said,¹³² "From all the plans [*that we have overheard*] they will come from everywhere. They will attack us."¹³³

F. Jewish Defensive Measures 4:13 - 23 [H. 4:7 - 17]

13 [H.4:7] At the lowest parts of the space behind the wall (*or, at the exposed portion of the wall*)¹³⁴ I stationed people according to their (*or, by*) families¹³⁵ with their swords, their spears and their bows.¹³⁶ 14 [H. 4:8] After I inspected how the situation was I stood up, saying to the nobles, officials and the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them! Remember the Lord who is great and awesome. Defend your fellow countrymen, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your homes."

15 [H. 4:9] When our enemies heard that we were forewarned of their planned attack

121 In Persian times they lived in southern Jordan and the Negev.

122 The Ammonites lived in Jordan with a foothold on the West Bank.

123 LXX: "Azotus." Western neighbors of Philistine origin. These people could have felt surrounded. Sanballat to the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites to the East, Arabs to the south and the Ashdodites to the west and southwest. Was this saber-rattling or a genuine threat? The potential for a siege was evident.

124 Literally: "to create him a confusion."

125 Elsewhere in Hebrew the meaning is "error." Possibly this usage comes from a cognate Arabic word source.

126 Literally: "for him."

127 Peshitta: "over her."

128 The Hebrew words give a positive reassurance that they were able to accomplish their task.

129 Literally: "our besiegers."

130 The Hebrew word might possibly mean "infiltrate."

131 The Hebrew text for this verse seems to be incomplete, thus becoming confusing.

132 Literally: "When the Jews who were living near them came to us and said to us ten times 'from all the places which you will return to (against) us.'"

133 The LXX has: "They will come up from every side against us." That implies that they come to warn of an invasion. Cf. TAN for a possible solution to a difficult text. One possibility for the ending of the sentence is: "all the plots that they devised against us."

134 Possibly a reference to the base stones of the wall. Smooth, clear rock surface?

135 This Hebrew word is uncertain.

136 The Hebrew is awkward. All the weapons for a minor war were available. MFT: "The foe placed themselves in the low ground behind the wall, at the breaches, but I posted the people by companies, armed with sword and spear and bow."

and that God had thwarted it, we all went back to work on the wall. ¹⁶ [H. 4:10] From that day on half of my workers ¹³⁷ worked on construction, and the other half held spears, shields, bows and body armor. ¹³⁸ The leaders fully supported all those who were rebuilding the walls of the house of Judah. ¹³⁹ ¹⁷ [H. 4:11] Those who were building on the wall, who were burden bearers, carried their loads ¹⁴⁰ in such a way that each toiled with one hand and held his weapon with the other hand. ¹⁸ [H. 12] Each of the builders ¹⁴¹ had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The trumpeter was at my side. ¹⁴² ¹⁹ [H. 4:13] I spoke to the important citizens, to the leaders as well as the ordinary people, saying; "The work is extensive and spread out widely. ¹⁴³ We are separated by great distances from one another. ²⁰ [H. 14] Rally around to the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet (*or, shofar*)! Our God will fight for us."

²¹ [H. 4:15] So we continued the work, and half of the workers held a spear from dawn till the stars appeared. ²² [H. 4:16] At that time I also said to the people, "Let every man and his servant ¹⁴⁴ spend the night inside Jerusalem so that they might be able to double as guards for us by night and may labor by day." ²³ [H. 4:17] Neither I nor my associates nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me -- none of us removed our clothes. Each kept his weapons at his hand. ¹⁴⁵

<CHAPTER 5>

V. Economic Problems 5:1 - 19

A. Internal Jewish Problems 5:1 - 13

¹ A great outcry ¹⁴⁶ arose from the [*laboring*] men and their wives, against their fellow Jews. ¹⁴⁷ ² Some of those said, "Many of us have given our sons and daughters as pledges. ¹⁴⁸ We need grain in order to stay alive." ³ Others said, "We must mortgage our fields, our vine-yards and our homes in order to get grain to prevent starvation because of

137 Hebrew unclear. Hebrew: *na'ar* servants who were the lowest class. Did Nehemiah look on the male citizenry who worked on the rebuilding merely as servants? In 5:10, 16; 13:11 they seem to be a special group of men, distinguished from the general Jewish population. The Hebrew word implies "youthful servants" whose responsibility as guards would be an early form of the National Guard.

138 MT: "held on the spears and the shields and the bows." The root word translated as "body armor" is *shah*, often translated as "coats of mail" or "habergeons."

139 LXX adds "who were building on the wall." MT: literally: "stood behind all the house of Judah."

140 Literally: "those that lift up the burdens were carrying." LXX seems to avoid translating the Hebrew word for "carrying," using the translation "armed." MT has a plural "loads," giving it uncertain meaning

141 Peshitta: "stone masons."

142 Literally: "he who sounded the trumpet."

143 MT: "the work is much and wide."

144 Cf. 4:16.

145 Vulgate: "every man stripped himself when he was to be washed." The Hebrew word *shlch* meaning "weapons" can be slightly emended to *slchu* changing the word to mean "water." An alternate translation could be: "Each of us took our weapon to the water." Josephus says of Nehemiah, "He himself made the rounds of the city by night, never tiring either through work of lack of food and sleep, neither of which he took for pleasure but as a necessity."

146 Hebrew: *aedqa qedola* = "a loud cry of distress." The situation perhaps stemmed from a long drought. It would not have been as bad based solely on the work on the wall. 52 days Cf. 6:15.

147 Literally: "Jewish brothers." The problem was so severe that contrary to normal practice the wives joined in the outcry (*or, court case*). In Ezra/Nehemiah women usually stay in the background. The exceptions are here and in Nehemiah 3:12.

148 It is possible that the text is corrupt and is in need of emendation. Literally: "We have numerous sons and daughters..." *bntinw* = "daughters." *btinw* = "houses." The translation above is emended. Some scholars emend to read: "We must barter our sons and daughters as pledges (surety)."

famine."¹⁴⁹ 4 Still others said, "We had to mortgage our fields and vineyards to pay the royal taxes."¹⁵⁰ 5 Now: we are as good as our fellow [Israelites] (*or, of the same race as our fellows*)¹⁵¹ and our children¹⁵² are no different; yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to enslavement. In fact, some of our daughters have already become enslaved.¹⁵³ However, we are powerless to prevent it¹⁵⁴ since our fields and vineyards now belong to others."

1. Nehemiah's Protest and Solution 5:6 - 13

6 I became very angry when I heard them express their complaints. 7 I carefully contemplated¹⁵⁵ the situation and I brought charges against¹⁵⁶ the nobles and officials, saying, "You are demanding interest on loans made for your own people!" Then I held a great assembly,¹⁵⁷ in opposing them. 9 I told them, "In so far as was possible¹⁵⁸ I have bought back our fellow [Israelites]¹⁵⁹ who were sold into slavery to the nations (*or, Gentiles*), but now you are selling your own kin, only to necessitate our having to buy them back."¹⁶⁰ They were silent, and could not find anything to reply. 9 I went on to say, "What you are doing is wrong! Shouldn't you live in awe of our God,¹⁶¹ thereby preventing any possible causes for taunts from the nations (*or, Gentiles*) who are our enemies. 10 Moreover, I, as well as my relatives¹⁶² and my servants are advancing money and grain to them. So let us abandon those claims and demands for interest!¹⁶³ 11 Return the fields, vineyards, olive orchards and houses immediately, along with the percentage of interest in money, grain, new wine and fine oil which you have demanded of them!"

12 Then they replied, "We will make restitution and will not demand anything from them in payment for their debts, cancelling them. We will do as you say!" I summoned the priests who were made to declare (*or, swear*) an oath that they would keep their promises. 13 Furthermore I shook out the fold of the sash of my garment¹⁶⁴ and said, "In a like manner

149 Normally after harvest would be the time to call for payment of debts but there was a famine. The law prescribed the maximum for indentured labor or slaves because of debt to be 7 years. LXX concludes the sentence with the thought that this must be done so "we can eat." Peshitta: "so we can eat and we shall live."

150 An example of this is found, stemming from the same period, in the Elephantine Papyri where Egyptian taxes force the people to do the same. LXX adds "and our house given as collateral."

151 The Hebrew is difficult to translate. Literally: "like the flesh of our fellows is our flesh." A possible translation might be, "our bodies are no different from the bodies of our fellows."

152 LXX has "sons, for we are of one flesh."

153 Possible readings might be: "Some of our daughters are singled out (*or, are ravaged*)." or "they are taken as a second wife of the household." The words hardly imply "rape" though that would be an evil result. JB: "raped." Hebrew *abduth* = "to become a female servant or domestic."

154 Literally: "there is not power to the power in our hands."

155 Hebrew: *mlk* "to master" in Aramaic. "to reign" in Hebrew. Possibly a Babylonian loan word meaning "to think, to contemplate." Having the same root the words in different languages have different meanings. LXX: "my heart took counsel within me." Vulgate: "my heart thought with myself." Some emend to read "my heart turned within my body." Peshitta: "my heart was broken within me."

156 MT: "I contended with." NEB: "I mastered my feelings and reasoned with the nobles."

157 Hebrew: *qhillah* = "assembly." Omitted by NEB. The contention seems to be: not exacting interest or usury which was forbidden. Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 23:20, but demand for important capital for a pledge. LXX: "a huge gathering."

158 LXX: "by our free will."

159 Literally: "The selling of Israelites who sold themselves." This was forbidden in Leviticus 25:22.

160 Or: "so that we should purchase" is a possible translation of the MT phrase.

161 Literally: "'walk in the fear of our God."

162 Peshitta: "my sons." LXX: "my acquaintances."

163 Emended it might read: "We have remitted their interest." Vulgate: "Let us forgive the debt that is owing to us." NIV: "But let the exacting of interest stop!"

164 A sash was worn like a belt which would have small items tucked into it since there were no pockets in the garment. To shake out the sash was a symbol of loosing everything.