**Nehemiah**

**Introduction**

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The books of Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the faithfulness of God to bring about His promises through His chosen people. The main topic in Ezra was the rebuilding of the temple and the main topic of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. After the building of the temple to allow for the proper worship of God, the city had to be rebuilt and the first agenda in that regard is the rebuilding of the physical wall of protection since they were still in a pagan nation. The walls had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and remained in ruins for almost one and one/half centuries. There are several OT prophecies about the rebuilding of Jerusalem such as the following:

* Jer 33:1-13 *Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying, (2) "Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it, the LORD is His name, (3) 'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.' (4) "For thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah which are broken down to make a defense against the siege ramps and against the sword, (5) 'While they are coming to fight with the Chaldeans and to fill them with the corpses of men whom I have slain in My anger and in My wrath, and I have hidden My face from this city because of all their wickedness: (6) 'Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. (7) 'I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first. (8) 'I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me. (9) 'It will be to Me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.' (10) "Thus says the LORD, 'Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, "It is a waste, without man and without beast," that is, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, (11) the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, "Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting"; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,' says the LORD. (12) "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'There will again be in this place which is waste, without man or beast, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds who rest their flocks. (13) 'In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah, the flocks will again pass under the hands of the one who numbers them,' says the LORD.*
* Amos 9:11-15 *"In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; (12) That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this. (13) "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "When the plowman will overtake the reaper And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; When the mountains will drip sweet wine And all the hills will be dissolved. (14) "Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them; They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, And make gardens and eat their fruit. (15) "I will also plant them on their land, And they will not again be rooted out from their land Which I have given them," Says the LORD your God.*
* Mic 7:11-20 *It will be a day for building your walls. On that day will your boundary be extended. (12) It will be a day when they will come to you From Assyria and the cities of Egypt, From Egypt even to the Euphrates, Even from sea to sea and mountain to mountain. (13) And the earth will become desolate because of her inhabitants, On account of the fruit of their deeds. (14) Shepherd Your people with Your scepter, The flock of Your possession Which dwells by itself in the woodland, In the midst of a fruitful field. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead As in the days of old. (15) "As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt, I will show you miracles." (16) Nations will see and be ashamed Of all their might. They will put their hand on their mouth, Their ears will be deaf. (17) They will lick the dust like a serpent, Like reptiles of the earth. They will come trembling out of their fortresses; To the LORD our God they will come in dread And they will be afraid before You. (18) Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. (19) He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. (20) You will give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old.*

The rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem was then begun in the timing of God with the work of the two men Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah means “the Lord comforts” and God certainly used him to uplift the spirit of the discouraged exiles bringing them hope as prophesied:

Isa 57:14-21 *And it will be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, Remove every obstacle out of the way of My people." (15) For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite. (16) "For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would grow faint before Me, And the breath of those whom I have made. (17) "Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry and struck him; I hid My face and was angry, And he went on turning away, in the way of his heart. (18) "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, (19) Creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," Says the LORD, "and I will heal him." (20) But the wicked are like the tossing sea, For it cannot be quiet, And its waters toss up refuse and mud. (21) "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."*

The first seven chapters of the book are in the first person as is also 12:31-13:31. These verses give insight into the life and spirit of an outstanding servant of God. He was an energetic leader whose style is an inspiration to all God’s people today. He was a cup-bearer of King Artaxerxes in Susa (2:1).

**Chapter 1**

**Neh 1:1-3**

*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, (2) that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. (3) They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."*

Hacaliah means “wait for Yahweh” and occurs only here and in 10:1-2. He also refers to his fathers being buried in Jerusalem (2:3,5) indicating he is from a royal family and so this is the reason he mentioned his father’s name. While working in Susa for King Artaxerxes, it just happened (!) that one of his brothers and some other men came to him from Judah. This was in the month Chislev (or Kislev) that spans the months of November to December in our calendar. This would be the third month if the year began with Tishri or the ninth month if the year began with Nisan, the most common reckoning. However verse 2-1 indicates that they were using Tishri as the start of the year. The twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes was 445 B.C. and the years before this had been very difficult of the king. There was a revolt in Egypt that lasted from 450 to 460 B.C. so the king would have been very eager to have supporters in Jerusalem. Susa was the winter capital of the Persian Empire and Ecbatana was their summer residence.

We remember that the events recorded in Esther took place in Susa as did the vision of Dan. 8. Hanani was either a biological brother or a fellow Jew but we will read in 7.2 that Nehemiah appointed him to a high office favors the first meaning. The questioning of Hanani concerning those Jews who had survived the captivity and had gone to Jerusalem shows his deep concern for his fellow Jews. We will see that this concern for his fellow Jews will be clear in all of his works described in this book. There would have been Jews in the Jerusalem area who had not gone into captivity and then returned as well as those who had returned from the exile. Since he asked concerning the remnant, we can consider that he is referring to those who had survived the captivity and returned from exile. By province, he is probably referring to the entire Trans-Euphrates area. Trans-Euphrates is the area where Judah and Jerusalem were located. From the perspective of the Persians and Babylon, Judah was literally across the Euphrates River ("Trans-Euphrates"):



Nebuchadnezzar destroyed he walls of Jerusalem and they remained in ruins for about one and one-half centuries. We can infer from Ezra 4:12 that the people returning first in 538 B.C. had started the rebuilding of the wall but had been kept from completing it: *let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.* The people reporting this event to the king were Rehum and Shimshai and they may have been instrumental in tearing down the initial start of the rebuilding of the wall. Nehemiah was then told that the wall had been destroyed and the gates burned.

**Neh 1:4-5**

*When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (5) I said, "I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,*

The remnant were still in captivity as they are still in the Persian Empire and surrounded and permeated with pagans who will do whatever they can to keep them from having a successful venture. Without a wall of protection they are especially vulnerable to attack. Nehemiah is then in deep mourning for the people as he fasted and prayed before God. Sitting down to pray in mourning became a custom among the Jews as they sit on low stools during the seven days of fasting. Daniel mourned for three weeks because of the sins of his people (Dan 10:2). “The God of Heaven” is a phrase that often occurs in the postexilic books and was even used by Persians when speaking of their god. It is also not new as it was used in*: "The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there.* (Gen 24:7). Seventeen of the twenty-two occurrences of this phrase are in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. It emphasizes the awesomeness of God as the ruler of heaven but also His distance from His people. This is in contrast to our understanding of the omnipresence of God although His people did have access to Him through prayer and fasting. LORD is the Tetragrammaton (Yahweh) that has associated with it the concepts of love and personal relationship.

This prayer of Nehemiah can be outlined as: Invocation to God, Confession of sins, Request for remembrance, and Request for success. Eight other prayers of Nehemiah are recorded in this book (2:4; 4:4-5; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). The order of the prayer is significant in that it starts with praise and proceeds to petition. A central theme in the OT is the special relationship of God with His people. The word *hesed* that is translated in verse 5 as “love” is used frequently in the OT as it is related to the covenant between God and His people and it also contains the concept of loyalty. Nehemiah writes that God preserves those who love Him and keep His commandments for such reciprocity is required. Many OT verses elaborate on the requirement of the Jews to obey all the commandments of God such as:

Exo 19:5-6 *'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; (6) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."*

**Neh 1:6-7**

*let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. (7) "We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.*

He knows that God will hear his prayer but he asks Him to listen to his fervent prayers on behalf of the sons of Israel. By asking that God’s eyes will be open he is asking God to answer within His providence regarding the situation. He acknowledges the sins and even takes personal responsibility by stating that they are sins that **we** have done. He even states that these sins are committed by him and his father’s house meaning all his relatives. He states that we have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, statutes, and ordinances which God has commanded Your servant Moses. Nehemiah knows that God’s laws are not capricious and that He knows what is best for His people and for all people. Nehemiah also understands the seriousness of not obeying God. By the details he is referring to the Pentateuch that has many statements concerning the required obedience of God’s people.

Commands are statements like the Ten Commandments: *Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction."* (Exo 24:12)

Decrees are items such as prescribed as the statute of Joshua: *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.* (Joshua 24:25) and the commandment to keep the Passover:

Exo 12:23-24 *"For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. (24) "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever.*

Laws are legal decisions or judgments such as:

Zec 7:9-10 *"Thus has the LORD of hosts said, 'Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; (10) and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.'*

Obedience to the writings of Moses plays a big role in Ezra and Nehemiah.

**Neh 1:8-11**

*"Remember the word 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 do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'*

Asking God to remember seems impertinent since God knows everything but Nehemiah is really just saying that he knows what God commanded Moses. He knows that unfaithfulness on the part of the Jews will result in extreme measures from God. Certainly God did scatter the Jews for in the centuries following the Babylonian conquest the Jews were scattered farther and farther away. In the NT time there were more Jews in the Diaspora than in Palestine:

* John 7:35 *The Jews then said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He?*
* Acts2:8-11 *"And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? (9) "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, (11) Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."*
* Jas 1:1 *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.*
* 1Pe 1:1-2 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.*

Nehemiah also knows that if they will repent and obey that God will bring them back to His chosen place as stated by scripture such as:

* Deu 30:1-4 *"So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, (2) and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, (3) then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (4) "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back.*
* Isa 11:12 *And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.*
* Jer 23:3 *"Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply.*
* Jer 29:14 *'I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'*
* Eze 11:17 *"Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel."'*

To gather them in a place where He has chosen for His name to dwell reminds us of:

Deu 12:5 *"But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come.*

**Neh 1:10-11**

*"They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. (11) "O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.*

Certainly they had sinned and failed to obey God but Nehemiah “reminds” God that these are still His people that He has redeemed by His power and hand as stated by many scripture verses such as:

* Deu 4:34 *"Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?*
* Deu 9:29 *'Yet they are Your people, even Your inheritance, whom You have brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.'*
* Deu 14:2 *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*
* 2Ch 6:5-6 *'Since the day that I brought My people from the land of Egypt, I did not choose a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man for a leader over My people Israel; (6) but I have chosen Jerusalem that My name might be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel.'*
* 1Pe 2:9 *But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

He then prays for God to listen carefully to his requests and to others who are similarly praying to Him. They all delight to praise God’s name so that what He grants will bring Him glory. He is not asking for worldly success but to make him successful in his requests to King Artaxerxes to whom he was his cupbearer. Although as cupbearer he had great influence on the king he did not expect a request he would make to Artaxerxes for his people would not be favorably received so he is asking for God to give him favor before the king. He refers to the king as “this man” perhaps to clearly state that Artaxerxes was only a man under the sovereignty of God. According to Ezra 4:21 Artaxerxes had earlier issued a decree to stop work on Jerusalem that perhaps extended to the wall *("So, now issue a decree to make these men stop work, that this city may not be rebuilt until a decree is issued by me.* Ezra 4:21) The events quoted here may have been due to the revolt of Egypt which would make it understandable that he would not want walls build around Jerusalem. However by this time the revolt was over and such may have made the king more susceptible to the coming request from Nehemiah. God is sovereign over all events and He made the conflict with Egypt subside so that King Artaxerxes would be inclined to grant a request from Nehemiah. Nehemiah’s final comment may have been an acknowledgement that God had already acted on his behalf to put him in a strategic position to make such a request to the king.

**Chapter 2**

**Neh 2:1-5**

*And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. (2) So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid. (3) I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?" (4) Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. (5) I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."*

Since Nisan covers much of our March-April, four months had passed since Nehemiah had received word about the events in Jerusalem. During these four months Nehemiah had been praying and fasting and waiting for the proper time to make his request known to the king. During certain feasts the kings would have been prone to allow some requests to be fulfilled. Since Nisan was the first month of the Persian new year, this may have been the occasion Nehemiah was anticipating. He states that until this moment he had controlled his emotions so as not to appear sad before the king. But now he allowed himself to show his sadness as part of his plan to achieve success before the king. “Sadness of heart” can also mean “a bad or evil heart” so Nehemiah was taking a risk that the king might interpret his appearance as some sort of evil plot before him. He was then very afraid of the king’s reaction. But he went ahead with his request.

The phrase “Let the king live forever” was a common method of addressing the king as also seen in Dan 2:4: *Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation."* He then proceeded with his plan as he told the king he was sad because of the condition of the city where his fathers were buried. He is careful not to mention Jerusalem by name because of the earlier decree of the king. He states that this place is desolate and its gates consumed by fire. He was telling the king how much he respected the place of the burial of his fathers and how ashamed he was of the current state of the place. The king seemed to be favorably impressed with Nehemiah’s statement for his question implies that he is leaning toward granting a request. He immediately prayed quickly to God probably asking for help in making his request in such a way that it would be granted by the king. Quick prayers are often helpful especially if we have been immersing ourselves in prayer prior to the event as had Nehemiah done. His preface to this request showed that he was submissive to the king regardless of the success or failure of his request. Note again he is careful not to mention Jerusalem but refers to his request to visit Judah as the place of the burial of his fathers.

**Neh 2:6-8**

*Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I gave him a definite time. (7) And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, (8) and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go." And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me.*

It seems strange that the queen was mentioned as sitting beside him and the word used for queen is *segal* which is not the usual name for queen. The queen was usually not present at great feasts. It may be that she was one of the favorite ones of his haram rather than Damaspia, his current queen. Some of have suggested that she was familiar with Nehemiah as he had been the main cupbearer for some time and would have been supportive of a request from him. The statement also may be just to afford a witness for the response of the king. Artaxerxes immediately showed his support by asking how long the journey would take and how long he would be gone. Nehemiah does not state what he said next but just reports that the king agreed with his request. He says that he did give the king a definite time but does not report it here. We know from 5:14 that he was governor in Jerusalem for twelve years but he probably gave the king a much shorter time.

Nehemiah planned his request carefully as he needed letters for safe travel especially since Artaxerxes had previously stopped the building (Ezra 4:17-22). He also asked the king for a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest to give him timber for beams for gates by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for a house in which Nehemiah would live. The name Asaph is Hebrew so he probably was a Jew! The location of the king’s forest is unknown. Some think it is in Lebanon that was famed for its cedars. They were used by Solomon for his temple (1 Kings 5:6, 9; 2 Chron 2:8-9, 16). However the most likely place is Solomon’s Garden at Ethan that is about six miles south of Jerusalem. In the construction of the city gates it is most likely to call for the use of indigenous oak, poplar, or terebinth (Gen 12:6; Josh 19:33; Judg 4:11) rather than imported cedars from Lebanon. He states that the king responded positively for all requests because God was granting him special favor. Nehemiah sets a great example of leadership for us in that he prayed, planned, and then acted in submission to God’s guidance.

**Neh 2:9-10**

*Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. (10) When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel.*

We cannot know when Nehemiah arrived at the locations of the governors beyond the Euphrates River but he did go directly to them to give them the letters from King Artaxerxes to that he would have save travel. We do not know either if Nehemiah asked the king for a military escort but he does tell us that he had such an escort. Ezra did not ask for such and did not have such protection: *For I was ashamed to request from the king troops and horsemen to protect us from the enemy on the way, because we had said to the king, "The hand of our God is favorably disposed to all those who seek Him, but His power and His anger are against all those who forsake Him."* (Ezra 8:22) There is no reason to suppose that Nehemiah had less trust of God than Ezra had. Some think that he presence of the escort was to demonstrate the support of the king for the project.

Sanballat comes from the Akkadian word meaning Sin (the moon god) has given life. His epithet “the Horonite” identifies him as coming from one of three places: Haman that is east of the Sea of Galilee, Horonaim in Moab, or upper or lower Beth-Horon which were two cities guarding the main road to Jerusalem. Not surprising based upon the meaning of the meaning of his name; he was the chief opponent of Nehemiah as we will see as we study the rest of this book. He also had the position of governor of Samaria and he had two sons with Hebrew names. Tobiah means “Yahweh is good” and he may have been a Judaizing Ammonite. He was married to the daughter of Shecaniah (3:29; 6:18) and his son Johohanan married a leader of one of the groups repairing the wall (3:4, 30; 6:18). He was also probably the governor of Ammon under the Persians. He may have been a relative of Tobiah who in Ezra 2:60 was rejected from the Jewish community because they did not have proper credentials and so may be a reason for his opposition to the work of Nehemiah. Both of these men were disturbed over the arrival of Nehemiah for political reasons since their authority was threatened by his arrival.

**Neh 2:11-16**

*So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. (12) And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. (13) So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. (14) Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. (15) So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. (16) The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.*

He does not tell us what he did during those three days. He may have rested and met with some of the leaders of the Jewish community. He went at night to minimize the number of people who knew what he was doing. He did not want opposition to his plans before he knew more about the state of the wall and where he would be building a new wall. He also had only one mount to minimize the noise of his travel this night. Up front he acknowledged that God was the director of the project involving Jerusalem. Several of the reference points may be seen on the small map below.

The Valley Gate was the chief gate in the western wall overlooking the Tyropoeon Valley. The Dragon’s Well or Jackal Well may have been a well, now unknown, on the east side of the Tyropoeon Valley and west of the wall. The Refuse Gate or Dung Gate was at the southern end of the city where two valleys meet. On this first part of his trip he saw the broken down walls and the gates that had been consumed by fire. The Fountain Gate was on the east near the south end of the city. The King’s Pool was inside the wall near the Fountain Gate so he then traveled somewhat inside what had been the wall due to all the debris from the destruction. He must have then traveled inside the old wall area as he inspected the debris and then he entered again the Valley Gate and returned to the place where he had begun his trip. “Officials” must represent all the leaders and he did not tell any of them what he had done. Similarly he did not yet tell the Jews, priests, nobles, the officials, or anyone else who would do the proposed work.



**Neh 2:17-18**

*Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." (18) I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.*

When he had decided the time was right, he spoke to them about the situation they all had to understand in Jerusalem. It had been 130 years since Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed the walls and gates of Jerusalem. It seems like they had become reconciled to the sad state of their community and it took an outsider to come in and inspire them to rebuild. Nehemiah was able to communicate to them how God had been favorable to him. He also told them about the support he had from King Artaxerxes for the project of rebuilding the walls and gates. After this encouragement the people responded enthusiastically and they began to participate in the project.

**Neh 2:19-20**

*But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" (20) So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."*

But Sanballat and Tobiah, whom we had previously discussed, were joined by Geshem the Arab to ridicule them. Geshem was a powerful leader of Qedar in northwest Arabia who was somewhat under Persian control but he was given a lot of authority in his region. He was a chieftain that controlled large areas from northeast Egypt to northern Arabia to southern Palestine. Geshem was probably opposed to this new work led by Nehemiah because he feared it would interfere with his lucrative trade in myrrh and frankincense. These three men accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king probably because they knew of the earlier decree of the king against the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Nehemiah’s response was very important for all of the workers. His answer had four parts:

1. He did not address his own authority or the letters of support he had from the king so he did not address his adversaries charge regarding Artaxerxes.
2. He gave all the credit and glory to God of heaven who would give them success.
3. He advised them to disregard the ridicules and threats and just go to work.
4. He also refused to compromise with the three opponents and he told them that they would not have a share in the work, the land, or the worship of the Jewish community.

Sanballat and Tobiah seem to have had some jurisdiction in the affairs of Judah but now they had none for King Artaxerxes had given such authority to Nehemiah. This chapter depicts Nehemiah as a forceful leader who is submitted to the sovereignty of God and does not seek any glory for himself but all is for the LORD.