**Nehemiah 5-8** - May 8th

Nehemiah Helps the Poor

**5**Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. **2**Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.” **3**Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”

**4**Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. **5**Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”

**6**When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. **7**I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them **8**and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

**9**So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? **10**I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! **11**Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them - one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.” **12**“We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. **13**I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!” At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

**14**Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year - twelve years - neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. **15**But the earlier governors - those preceding me - placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. **16**Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

**17**Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. **18**Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

**19**Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

Further Opposition to the Rebuilding

**6**When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it - though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates -  **2**Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me; **3**so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” **4**Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. **5**Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter **6**in which was written:

“It is reported among the nations - and Geshem says it is true - that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king **7**and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.” **8**I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.” **9**They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

**10**One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you - by night they are coming to kill you.” **11**But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” **12**I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **13**He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

**14**Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me. **15**So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

Opposition to the Completed Wall

**16**When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

**17**Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. **18**For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. **19**Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

**7**After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. **2**I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do. **3**I said to them, “The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses.”

The List of the Exiles Who Returned

**4**Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. **5**So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:

**6**These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, **7**in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah):

The list of the men of Israel:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **8**the descendants of Parosh | 2,172 |
| **9**of Shephatiah | 372 |
| **10**of Arah | 652 |
| **11**of Pahath-Moab (through the line of Jeshua and Joab) | 2,818 |
| **12**of Elam | 1,254 |
| **13**of Zattu | 845 |
| **14**of Zakkai | 760 |
| **15**of Binnui | 648 |
| **16**of Bebai | 628 |
| **17**of Azgad | 2,322 |
| **18**of Adonikam | 667 |
| **19**of Bigvai | 2,067 |
| **20**of Adin | 655 |
| **21**of Ater (through Hezekiah) | 98 |
| **22**of Hashum | 328 |
| **23**of Bezai | 324 |
| **24**of Hariph | 112 |
| **25**of Gibeon | 95 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **26**the men of Bethlehem and Netophah |  188 |
| **27**of Anathoth | 128 |
| **28**of Beth Azmaveth | 42 |
| **29**of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth | 743 |
| **30**of Ramah and Geba | 621 |
| **31**of Mikmash | 122 |
| **32**of Bethel and Ai | 123 |
| **33**of the other Nebo | 52 |
| **34**of the other Elam | 1,254 |
| **35**of Harim | 320 |
| **36**of Jericho | 345 |
| **37**of Lod, Hadid and Ono | 721 |
| **38**of Senaah | 3,930 |

**39**The priests:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua) | 973 |
| **40**of Immer | 1,052 |
| **41**of Pashhur | 1,247 |
| **42**of Harim | 1,017 |

**43**The Levites:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| the descendants of Jeshua (through Kadmiel, the line of Hodaviah) | 74 |

**44**The musicians:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| the descendants of Asaph |  148 |

**45**The gatekeepers:

|  |
| --- |
| the descendants of |
| Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai |  138 |

**46**The temple servants:

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| --- |
| the descendants of |
| Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, |
| **47**Keros, Sia, Padon, |
| **48**Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmai, |
| **49**Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, |
| **50**Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, |
| **51**Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, |
| **52**Besai, Meunim, Nephusim, |
| **53**Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, |
| **54**Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, |
| **55**Barkos, Sisera, Temah, |
| **56**Neziah and Hatipha |

**57**The descendants of the servants of Solomon:

|  |
| --- |
| the descendants of |
| Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, |
| **58**Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, |
| **59**Shephatiah, Hattil, |
| Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **60**The temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon | 392 |

**61**The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel:

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| --- |
| **62**the descendants of  |
| Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda | 642 |

**63**And from among the priests:

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| --- |
| the descendants of  |
| Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name). |

**64**These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. **65**The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim.

**66**The whole company numbered 42,360, **67**besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 245 male and female singers.**68**There were 736 horses, 245 mules, **69**435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

**70**Some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. **71**Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. **72**The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests.

**73**The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

Ezra Reads the Law

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns,

**8 1**all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

**2**So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. **3**He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

**4**Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. **5**Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.**6**Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

**7**The Levites - Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah - instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.**8**They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

**9**Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

**10**Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” **11**The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.” **12**Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

**13**On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. **14**They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month**15**and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters” - as it is written.

**16**So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. **17**The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great. **18**Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.