



NEHEMIAH

How Nehemiah felt called

1 • ¹The words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislew, in the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes, I was in the Citadel of Susa when ²Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some men from Judah. I asked them about the Jewish survivors who had returned from exile and about Jerusalem.

³They answered me, “The people now live there in the province, in the midst of great poverty and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates burned.”

⁴When I heard these words, I sat down, wept and mourned for days. I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. ⁵And I said,

“O Yahweh, God of heaven, you are fearsome and great. You keep your covenant and your kindness towards those who love you and fulfill your commandments. ⁶May your ears be attentive and your eyes open to listen to the prayer of your servant!

I am now in your presence day and night, for your servants, the chil-

dren of Israel. I confess to you the sins we children of Israel have committed against you: I myself and the family of my father have sinned. ⁷We have acted very badly. We did not fulfill your commandments, laws and instructions which you gave to your servant Moses.

⁸But remember, too, what you said to Moses: If you are not faithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations. ⁹But if you fulfill my commandments and put them into practice, I shall again lead you back to the place where I have chosen to dwell. I shall gather you, though you be dispersed to the ends of the world.

¹⁰So then, Lord, do not forget that they are your servants; they are your people, whom you have saved with your great power and strong hand.

¹¹Listen to my prayer and to the prayer of those who only wish to honor your Name. I ask you to help me now. May I be well received by the king.”

I was then in charge of preparing the drinks of the king.

• **1.1** Nehemiah served in the palace of king Artaxerxes as cupbearer, a high position at a time when kings were afraid of being poisoned.

He is a man whose future is assured: yet, he leaves everything to serve God.

Nehemiah's vocation comes from:

– His great trust in God's promises.

– An understanding of history which only a believer can have: Jews need not blame anyone else for their difficult situation. Their own

sins are the cause of their misfortunes. They must not expect their national restoration to come from the kindness of more powerful countries, but from their own conversion.

Nehemiah is an example of all those who are able to recognize the voice of the Lord through events and who do not wait for a special call to get to work. There is no doubt that every Christian, trusting in God, is called to discover and achieve what God expects for the salvation of the world, just as Nehemiah did.

Nehemiah gives up everything to go to Jerusalem

2[•] ¹In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes, I was doing my duty as cup-bearer. I took up the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad before the king in the past. ²So, the king said to me, “Why do you look sad? You don’t look sick. Is there something that bothers you?”

I became hesitant. ³And I said, “May the king live forever! How could I afford not to be sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates are burned down?” ⁴The king said to me, “What do you want, then?” I asked help of God from heaven and ⁵said to the king, “If it seems good to the king and if he is pleased with my work, then may he send me to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, that I may rebuild it.”

⁶The queen was sitting beside the king, and the king asked me, “How long will you be gone? When will you be back?” I told him the date and he allowed me to leave. ⁷And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, may you give me letters for the governors of the province at the other side of the River that I may travel to Judah, ⁸and also a letter to Asaph, the caretaker of the king’s forest, for I will need wood for the gates of the Citadel near the Temple, for the walls of the city and for the house where I shall live.”

The good hand of God was supporting me, so that the king gave me what I asked. ⁹I went to the gover-

nors at the other side of the River, and delivered to them the letters of the king. The king had ordered that I be accompanied by officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰But Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah, the Ammonite officer, came to know of my arrival and it displeased them that someone had come to help the Israelites.

¹¹I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. ¹²Then I arose in the night, accompanied by a few men, without telling anyone what my God had inspired me and what I planned to do in Jerusalem.

Bringing along only the horse on which I rode, ¹³I went out by night by the Gate of the Garbage Dump, I inspected the ruined wall of Jerusalem and the burned gates.

¹⁴I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King’s Reservoir, but my horse could not pass through anywhere. ¹⁵So I went up, in the night, by the ravine. I inspected the wall and turned back, entering by the Valley Gate.

So I returned to the house. ¹⁶The counselors did not know where I had been or what I was doing. Until that time I had not yet told any of the Jews or the counselors, or the priests or the nobles, or any of those in public office.

¹⁷Then I said to them, “You yourselves see the misery we are in because Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and put an end to this humiliating situation.”

¹⁸And I recounted to them how the

5:14;
13:6

Ezra 8:22

• **2.1** Nehemiah asks and receives because he is not a nuisance, and his years of loyal service have earned him affection and esteem. His discretion and initiative are underscored and his fervent words encourage skeptics whom he persuades.

Was it necessary to build the walls of Jerusalem? In fact, more than the restoration, the Bible stresses the way it was achieved: by calling for everyone’s cooperation, Nehemiah builds up the morale of the Jerusalem community.

good hand of God had helped me, and what the king had told me. Everyone said, "Let us begin the work." And they encouraged one another to make this good work a reality.

¹⁹Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite officer and Geshem the Arab heard of this. They laughed at us and came to tell us, "What are you doing? You are rebelling against the king." ²⁰I answered them, "The God of heaven shall grant us success. We, his servants, are now going to build. But as for you, you have neither right nor inheritance nor anything to do with Jerusalem."

They begin to build the wall

Jer 31:38

3 ¹The high priest Eliashib and his brothers, the priests, were entrusted with the building of the Sheep Gate. They built it, set its doors and continued as far as the Tower of Hananel. ²The people of Jericho worked at their side, and farther on, ^{13:16}Zaccur, son of Imri. ³The Fish Gate was assigned to the sons of Hasse-naah. They set up and fixed its doors, bolts and bars.

⁴Next to them, Meremoth, son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, and Meshullam, son of Berechiah, son of Meshe-zabel built the next section and at their side, Zadok, son of Baana, repaired another section. ⁵At their side, the inhabitants of Tekoa worked, but their nobles wanted not to labor in the service of their Lord.

⁶The Old Gate was repaired by Joiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah. They set up and fixed the gate with its bolts and bars.

⁷Next to them worked Malatiah of Gibeon and Yadan of Meronot with the people of Gibeon and Mizpah, beside the house of the provincial governor. ⁸Next to them worked

Uzziel, of the jewellers' guild. Next were Hananiah, of the perfumers' guild: they strengthened Jerusalem as far as the Wall of the Square. ⁹Next to them repairs were carried out by Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem. ¹⁰Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph worked opposite his own house; next to him repairs were carried out by Hattush son of Hashabneiah. ¹¹Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-moab repaired the next section as far as the Tower of the Furnaces. ¹²Next to them worked Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. ¹³Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they restored it, constructed its framework and set its doors, bolts and bars in place, and repaired a thousand cubits of wall up to the Dung Gate. ¹⁴Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate, he and his sons: he set its doors, bolts and bars in place. ¹⁵Shallum, son of Colhozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, worked at the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, and set its doors, bolts and bars in place. He also rebuilt the wall of the conduit cistern, adjoining the king's garden, as far as the steps coming down from the Citadel of David. ¹⁶Next to him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, worked up to a point opposite the tombs of David, the artificial pool and the House of Heroes. ¹⁷Next to him worked the Levites: Rehum son of Bani and next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, for his own district. ¹⁸Next to them worked their brothers: Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah; ¹⁹next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, opposite the

slope up to the Armory, towards the Angle.

²⁰Next to him Baruch son of Zabbai worked from the Angle as far as the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹Next to him Meremoth son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz from the door of Eliashib's house to its farther end. ²²Next to him worked the priests who lived there. ²³Next to them worked Benjamin and Hasshub, opposite their own houses. Next to them Azariah son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, beside his own house. ²⁴Next to him Binnui son of Henadad from the house of Azariah up to the Angle. ²⁵Next to him Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the corner of the tower jutting out over the upper palace of the king near the prison courtyard. Next to him Pedaiah son of Parosh worked ²⁶as far as the Water Gate, in an easterly direction and up to a point opposite the projecting tower. ²⁷Next to him the men of Tekoa worked opposite the great tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

²⁸From the Horse Gate onwards repairs were carried out by the priests, each opposite his own house. ²⁹Next to them worked Zadok son of Immer opposite his own house. Next to him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, keeper of the East Gate. ³⁰Next to him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zaphan. Next to him Meshullam son of Berechiah worked opposite where he lived. ³¹Next to him Malchijah, of the goldsmiths' guild, repaired as far as the quarters of the helpers and the

merchants, opposite the Watch Gate as far as the high chamber of the corner. ³²And between the high chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate repairs were carried out by the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The enemies try to discourage Nehemiah

- ³³When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry. He ridiculed the Jews ³⁴and said before his brothers and the lords of Samaria, "What are those miserable Jews trying to do? Are they perhaps going to rebuild, finish and celebrate the inauguration in a single day? Do they think they can make stones out of heaps of ruins?"

³⁵Tobiah the Ammonite who was by him said, "Let them build, for if any fox goes up on their wall, it will surely collapse.

³⁶Listen, O our God, for we are despised! May their insult fall back upon their own heads; give them up to contempt in a land where they shall be exiled! ³⁷Do not cover their guilt nor let their sin be blotted out in your presence, for they have offended those who built."

³⁸The people worked with all their hearts and we finished half the wall's height.

4 ¹Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the residents of Azotus saw that the repair of the wall was advancing, and that we had begun covering the holes. ²They were greatly enraged, and all of them

Jer
18:23

• **3.33** Later, Nehemiah's work arouses jealousy and suspicion. Nothing unusual in that. The firmness of this man alone was enough to inspire everyone. At that very moment, building the Jerusalem walls was the specific task which, if not done, would have stopped sacred history. Had the Jewish people given in and delayed, they would have lost

the means to their independence and the meaning of their mission. Similarly today, although the mission of the Church is mostly spiritual, our fidelity to the Lord depends upon our attitude in the face of violations and betrayals of the truth in very specific aspects of social life.

agreed to attack Jerusalem and humiliate me.

³So we prayed to our God, and set a guard day and night. ⁴The people of Judah said, “The strength of the bearers is already failing, and much debris still remains; we can never rebuild the wall.” ⁵And our enemies said, “We will take them by surprise before they know it. We will kill them and stop their work.” ⁶But some Jews who lived with them came to notify us about this. Ten times they said to us, “From all the places where they live, they shall set out against us.”

⁷So I ordered that people be stationed behind the wall, there in the lowest part. I stationed them by families, with their swords, spears, and bows. ⁸They were afraid, but I stood up and said to the nobles, the counselors and the rest of the people, “Remember the Lord, great and magnificent, and fight for your brothers, sons and daughters, wives and homes.”

⁹When our enemies learned that we had been notified, that God willed that their plans be thwarted, we all returned to the wall, each one to his work.

¹⁰But from that day on, only half of my men worked while the other half, with bows, spears, shields and armor, stood behind all the people of Judah ¹¹building the wall. The bearers picked up their loads with one hand because they held a weapon with the other hand. ¹²Each of the

builders had his sword girded at his side as he worked.

Beside me was the man assigned to sound the trumpet. ¹³I told the nobles, the counselors and the rest of the people, “The extent of the work is great and we are scattered along the wall, far from one another, ¹⁴so when you hear the sound of the horn, come to our aid at once and our God shall fight for us.”

¹⁵So we scheduled the work from daybreak till the stars came out, half of us with weapons in hand. ¹⁶I also said to the people, “Everyone shall spend the night within Jerusalem, with his servants. So we may keep guard by night and work by day.”

¹⁷Yet my brothers, my men, the men of the guard who followed me, and I did not take off our clothes when we slept. Everyone kept his weapon with him.

The rich must share the sacrifices of the poor

5 • ¹The common people and their wives presented very serious complaints against their Jewish brothers.

²Some of them said, “We have big families and we need wheat to eat for strength to live.” ³Others cried out, “We have to mortgage our fields, vineyards and houses to get grain because of this famine.” ⁴Others said, “We have borrowed money on account of our fields and vineyards in order to pay the tax to the king. ⁵ Though we are of the same race as

• **5.1** *We are of the same race as our brothers.* The rulers keep saying that the reconstruction requires sacrifice. The Jewish people demand that the sacrifices be really shared by all. Those who have enough for today must cancel the debts of those who have nothing.

Are you now buying your own brothers? Nehemiah defends the most humble, and de-

nounces the sin the rich have committed without realizing it: driven by the logic of debt and credit, they have come to submit their own people to slavery.

We rightfully seek liberation from exploitative and anti-social governments. Finally the exploitative spirit in each one of us may be the last vice to be uprooted.

our brothers and our children are not different from their children, we have to give our sons as slaves; even many of our daughters are now regarded as concubines. And we do not have any other solution, inasmuch as our fields and vineyards have passed on to others.”

⁶Those complaints and accusations filled me with indignation. ⁷After thinking about this situation, I reproached the nobles and the counselors. I told them: “You are oppressing your own relatives by charging them interest when they borrow money!” Then I called a public meeting to deal with the problem. ⁸At the meeting I said to them, “Why do you not have compassion on your brothers?”

Because of this, I held a great assembly and said to them, “We have rescued, according to our resources, our Jewish brothers who were slaves. But are you now buying your own brothers?”

They remained silent. They could not answer. ⁹And I continued, “What you do is not good. Should you not live in obedience to our God lest we be put to shame by our pagan enemies? ¹⁰My brothers, my relatives and I have also lent money and wheat. Now then, let us forget everything they owe us, ¹¹returning to them at once their fields, vineyards, and olive groves, and canceling their debts in money, wheat, wine and oil.” ¹²They answered me, “We will return these and demand nothing from them. We will do as you have said.”

So I called the priests, and before them made all of them swear an oath

that they would fulfill their promise. ¹³Then I shook out the folds of my mantle, saying, “So may God shake out of his house and his inheritance all who do not fulfill this word, and may he be so shaken that nothing is left of him.” The whole assembly answered, “Amen” and praised Yahweh. And the people fulfilled their promise.

¹⁴King Artaxerxes had appointed me governor of the land of Judah in the twentieth year of his reign. Until the thirty-second year, or rather, for twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ever demanded to be given the governor’s bread. ¹⁵But the former governors had collected forty pieces of silver per day from the people. This payment was a burden to the people, and so were their servants.

¹⁶As I dedicated myself to rebuilding the wall, I did not buy fields; and all my men were there helping. ¹⁷At my table a hundred and fifty men, leaders and counselors were seated, besides those who came to us from neighboring nations. ¹⁸A male calf, six choice rams and fowls were slaughtered daily, and every ten days a great quantity of wine was brought. But though all these were charged to my account, I never asked for the governor’s bread, because the people were already burdened enough with the task of reconstruction.

¹⁹Remember for my good, my God, all that I have done for this people!

Further opposition to rebuilding

6 • ¹Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies learned that I had rebuilt the

• **6.1** Sanballat uses every means to discourage Nehemiah:

3:33—mockery and insults.

4:2—threat of attack.

6:2—psychological warfare.

6:6—accusations.

6:14—bribing false prophets.

There will always be people who take advantage of God’s word to support governments or to deceive the people.

Note the expression in verse 13—to *frighten me and put me to shame*. Quite often, fear is a slippery way leading to sin.

wall of Jerusalem. There was no hole left in it, although the doors had not been set up yet. ²Then Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message saying, “Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.”

They intended to do me harm; ³but I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am much occupied in a very important work, I cannot come down to meet you, for the work would stop if I left it.” ⁴They invited me again four times, but I gave them the same answer every time.

⁵Then Sanballat invited me for the fifth time. His servant brought an open letter which said the following, ⁶“Do you know the news that circulates among those who are not Jews? Gashmu says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are rebuilding the wall. ⁷And you also wish to become their king, and have already chosen prophets to proclaim you king of Jerusalem. The king shall know of this, so come, that the two of us may talk.”

⁸But I sent to him, saying, “There’s nothing true in what you say; you have invented this story.” ⁹For they all wanted to frighten us, saying: “Let us discourage them that they may not finish the work.”

But I, on the contrary, worked with greater strength. ¹⁰Then I went to Shemaiah, son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, since he could not leave his house. He said to me, “Let us meet together in the House of God, within the sanctuary, and then close its doors, for they are coming to kill you, to strike you this very night.”

¹¹But I answered him, “Should a man like me flee? Why should a man like me seek sanctuary to save my life? I will not go.” ¹²I understood then that Semaiah had not been sent by God but that Tobiah and Sanballat had brought him ¹³to frighten me. In

hiding in the sanctuary, I would have committed an offense, and this would have damaged my reputation and put me to shame.

¹⁴O my God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done; and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who tried to frighten me.

¹⁵The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶When our enemies and the neighboring nations knew about it, they were afraid and lost courage. They had to recognize the work of God in this.

¹⁷During that time, several distinguished Jews often wrote to and received letters from Tobiah. ¹⁸Tobiah had many friends in Judah for he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah, and because his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah. ¹⁹They even came to speak well of Tobiah in my presence, and recounted to him all my words as well. And it was he—Tobiah—who sent letters to frighten me.

7 ¹When the wall was built and the doors were in place, gatekeepers were designated to keep watch. ²Then I set my brother Hanani as governor of Jerusalem, and Hanaiah as head of the Citadel, for he was a faithful man and true servant of God as few can be found. ³Then I said to them, “Open the gates of Jerusalem only when the sun begins to get hot, but while it is still day, close and bar the doors while the guards are still at their posts.

And during the night, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall come out to keep guard, some at their posts and others in front of their houses.”

The new population of Jerusalem

⁴The city was spacious and wide, but

it had few inhabitants and many houses had not been rebuilt. ⁵God inspired in me the idea to assemble the leaders, the counselors and the people to take a census. I found the registry book of the census of those who had returned from exile in the beginning. I found the following written in it:

Ezra 2 ⁶These are the people of the province who returned from exile whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported, but returned to Jerusalem and Judea, each to his city:

⁷These are the Israelites who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah; here are the numbers:

⁸The sons of Parosh, 2,172; ⁹those of Shephatiah, 372; ¹⁰those of Arah, 652; ¹¹those of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818; ¹²the sons of Elam, 1,254; ¹³those of Zattu, 845; ¹⁴those of Zaccai, 760; ¹⁵those of Binnui, 648; ¹⁶those of Bebai, 628; ¹⁷those of Azgad, 2,322; ¹⁸those of Adonimkan, 667; ¹⁹those of Bigvai, 2,067; ²⁰those of Adin, 655; ²¹those of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98; ²²those of Hashum, 328; ²³those of Bezai, 324; ²⁴those of Hariph, 112; ²⁵those of Gibeon, 95.

²⁶The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188; ²⁷those of Anathoth, 128; ²⁸those of Bethazmaveth, 42; ²⁹those of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743; ³⁰those of Ramah and Geba, 621; ³¹those of Michmas, 122; ³²those of Bethel and Ai, 123; ³³those of the other Nebo, 52.

³⁴The sons of the other Elam, 1,254; ³⁵those of Harim, 320; ³⁶those of Jericho, 345; ³⁷those of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721; ³⁸those of Senaah, 3,930.

³⁹The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973; ⁴⁰those of Immer, 1,052; ⁴¹those of Pashhur, 1,247; ⁴²those of Harim, 1,017.

⁴³The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.

⁴⁴The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148.

⁴⁵The gatekeepers: the sons of Shalum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, of Shobai, 138.

⁴⁶The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, of Hasupha, of Tabbaoth, ⁴⁷of Ke-

ros, of Sia, of Padon, ⁴⁸of Lebana, of Hagaba, of Shalmal, ⁴⁹of Hanan, of Giddel, of Gahar, ⁵⁰of Reaiah, of Rezin, of Nekoda, ⁵¹of Gazzam, of Uzza, of Paseah, ⁵²of Besai, of Meunim, of Nephushessim, ⁵³of Bakbuk, of Hakupha, of Harhur, ⁵⁴of Bazlith, of Mehida, of Harsha, ⁵⁵of Barkos, of Sisera, of Temah, ⁵⁶of Neziah, of Hatipha.

⁵⁷The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, of Sophereth, of Perida, ⁵⁸of Jaala, of Darkon, of Giddel, ⁵⁹of Shephatiah, of Hattil, of Pochereth-hazzenaim, of Amon. ⁶⁰All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

⁶¹And these were they who came up from Telmelah, Telharsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not prove that their families and ancestry were of Israelite origin: ⁶²the sons of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, 642. ⁶³And of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz, of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. ⁶⁴These people searched for their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood. ⁶⁵And the governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest would make a decision through the Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁶The whole assembly together was 42,360, ⁶⁷besides their male and female servants: 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.

⁶⁸They had 736 horses, 245 mules; ⁶⁹435 camels; 6,720 donkeys. ⁷⁰Some of the heads of families gave offerings for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments. ⁷¹The heads of families gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas, and 2,200 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.

⁷²The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priests' garments.

⁷³The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their cities.

And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

Ezra reads the Law

8¹ In the seventh month, all the people gathered as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which Yahweh had given to Israel. ²Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all the children who could understand what was being read. It was the first day of the seventh month. ³Ezra read the book before all of them from early morning until midday in the square facing the Water Gate; and all who heard were attentive to the Book of the Law.

⁴Ezra, the teacher of the Law, stood on a wooden platform built for that occasion and to his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maa-seiah; and to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hasbad-danah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

⁵Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was in a higher place; and when he opened it, all the people stood. ⁶Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God; and all the people lifted up their hands and answered, "Amen! Amen!" And they bowed their heads to the ground.

⁷The Levites Joshua, Bani and the rest of their brothers explained the Law to the people who were standing. ⁸They read from the Book

of the Law of God, clarifying and interpreting the meaning, so that everyone might understand what they were hearing.

⁹Then Ezra, the teacher of the Law, said to the people, "This day is dedicated to Yahweh, your God, so do not be sad or weep." He said this because all wept when they heard the reading of the Law. ¹⁰Then he said to them, "Go and eat rich foods, drink sweet wine and share with him who has nothing prepared.

This day is dedicated to the Lord, so do not be sad. The joy of Yahweh is our strength."

¹¹The Levites also calmed the people down, saying, "Do not weep. This day is a festival day. Do not be sad." ¹²And the people went their way to eat, drink and share, and they had a great feast, because they had understood the words that had been proclaimed to them.

¹³On the second day, the heads of the families, the priests and the Levites came together to Ezra, the teacher of the Law, in order to learn the Law. ¹⁴There they read that Yahweh had commanded the children of Israel that they should dwell in huts during the feast of the seventh month. ¹⁵Then they proclaimed in all the cities and in Jerusalem: "Go to the mountains and bring branches of olive, pine, myrtle, palm and of any leafy tree to build huts according to what is commanded."

¹⁶The people went out and brought

Ezra 7:6

Lev
23:33

• **8.1** This first public reading of the Law marks a very important date of sacred history. Until that time, the people of Israel lived their faith through praying and taking part in the Temple ceremonies. Decisions and preaching came to them through priests and prophets. They did not feel the need to read a Bible.

Several books of our Bible were already in existence but they were kept in the Temple or the kings' palace: they were not within reach of the people nor were they the foundation of their faith. Now, however, new demands are made and they no longer have prophets as be-

fore. Ezra understands that in the future, the Jewish community will grow through the reading, meditation on and interpretation of the sacred book. Ezra himself tries to gather and complete the sacred books, and a new age begins wherein the Bible will be everyone's book and the basis of their faith.

This religious and cultural transition is similar in the Church in recent years. People went to church; they prayed and they were taught, but the Bible was foreign to them. However, now the Christian faith can only become strong through the word of God read and

branches and built huts for themselves on the roofs of their houses, or in their yards, or in the courtyards of the House of Yahweh, or in the square at the Water Gate or in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

¹⁷The whole assembly of those who had returned from exile built huts and dwelt in them, a thing the Israelites had not done since the days of Joshua, son of Nun. And there was great rejoicing.

¹⁸They read the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day of the feast. The feast lasted for seven days as prescribed and there was a solemn assembly on the eighth day.

The Israelites confess their sins

9 • ¹On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the Israelites assembled to fast. They put on sackcloth and sprinkled dust upon their heads. ²The race of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners; they stood and confessed their sins and those of their ancestors.

³They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh, their God, for three hours. For another three hours, they confessed their sins and bowed before Yahweh, their God.

⁴Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani stood on the platform of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to Yahweh, their God. ⁵Then the Levites: Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah,

Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethaliah said, "Arise, bless Yahweh, our God, forever and ever. Blessed be your glorious Name which is beyond all blessing and praise."

Prayer of Ezra

⁶Then Ezra said, "You, Yahweh, you alone made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and all their army, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all, and all the angels of heaven adore you.

⁷You, Yahweh, are the God who chose Abram; you brought him out of Ur of Chaldea, and gave him the name Abraham.

⁸You found him faithful to you and made with him the Covenant to give him and his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite. And you have fulfilled your word, for you are just.

⁹You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and listened to their cry by the Red Sea.

¹⁰You worked signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his ministers and all his people, for you knew that they had treated us harshly, and you have received fame to this day.

Gen 12:1;
17:5

7-12

heard in the community. Indeed we are behind time: this renewal should have started four centuries ago when Protestantism began.

The assembly gathered by Ezra will serve as the model for the religious life of the Jewish community. The solemn worship in the Jerusalem Temple is not suppressed, but, from that time on, in every city the Jews will have a synagogue, that is, a meeting place where they will gather on the Sabbath to hear God's word and to sing psalms.

• **9.1** We must relate this penance ceremony with chapters 9 and 10 of Ezra. It deals with asking forgiveness for the sins which separate people from God's law and are harmful to the race of Israel. They stress especially the sin of marrying women of another race and a different religion: the Bible

knows that marrying someone of another religion often brings a person to move away from their own religious community. This was Solomon's sin.

After publicly confessing the faults of the community, they remember God's mercy: it is useless to know the sins if feelings of inner repentance are not aroused in remembering how God always forgives generously. Following, we have a summary of sacred history showing God's mercy towards his people.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, several commitments are made: these are necessary to counter the weakness of the will, and to aid the struggle against laxity. It is not merely a question of rules; the risk consists in paying more attention to external observance than to the spirit of the Law whose goal is to form a people always ready to serve God.

14—15 ¹¹You divided the sea before our ancestors who passed through the midst of the sea without their feet getting wet. You cast their pursuers into the depths of the sea, as stones fall into the deep waters.

¹²You guided them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to light for them the way they should follow.

19 ¹³You came down upon Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven; you gave them just decisions and laws that express truth, excellent precepts and commandments.

¹⁴You taught them to consecrate the sabbath to you; you gave them commandments, precepts and the Law, through the hand of Moses, your servant.

16—17 ¹⁵You gave them bread from heaven and told them to satisfy their hunger; you made water gush forth from the rock to quench their thirst, and commanded them to go and take possession of the land which you had sworn to give them.

¹⁶But our fathers became proud and hard-headed, and they did not listen to your commands.

Num 14:1-4 ¹⁷They refused to listen and to remember all the marvels you did for them. They hardened their hearts rebelliously and wanted to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you, God of forgiveness, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in kindness, did not abandon them.

32 ¹⁸They even made for themselves a molten calf and said: 'This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt,' and they terribly insulted you and blasphemed you.

¹⁹But you, in your great kindness, did not abandon them in the desert; the pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, by which you showed them the way they should take.

²⁰You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them; you gave them manna so they could eat, and water to quench their thirst.

Is 63:11;
63:14

²¹Forty years you cared for them in the desert and they lacked nothing, neither did their clothes wear out or their feet swell.

²²You gave them kingdoms and lands; you allotted to them the frontier lands. They took possession of the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and the land of Og, king of Bashan.

Num 21:
21-35

²³And you multiplied their sons as the stars of heaven, bringing them to the land you promised their fathers.

²⁴Their children entered and took possession of the land. Before them you crushed the land's inhabitants, the Canaanites whom you gave into their hands with their kings and all the inhabitants, to do to them as they pleased.

²⁵They conquered fortified cities and a fertile land, took possession of houses well-stocked, wells ready-hewn, vineyards and olive groves, and fruit trees in great abundance. They ate, were satisfied and grew fat, and they lived comfortably by your great kindness.

Dt 6:10

²⁶But then, they were disobedient and they rebelled against you. They threw your Law behind their backs, they killed your prophets and they terribly blasphemed you.

²⁷You handed them over to their enemies who oppressed them. In their oppression they cried to you, and you listened to them from heaven, so by your immense kindness, you sent them saviors who freed them from their oppressors.

Jdg 2

²⁸But when they were at peace, they did evil against you again, and you gave them over to the hands of the enemies who oppressed them. Once more they cried to you, and

you listened to them from heaven, and by your great kindness you saved them many times.

²⁹Insistently, you asked them to return to your Law, but they were very proud, so they did not listen to your commands and decisions. They did not observe what people should fulfill to have life. They turned their backs and did not listen to you for they were hard-headed.

³⁰You were patient with them for many years. You admonished them by your Spirit through the mouth of the prophets; but they did not listen.

Then you gave them over into the hands of the peoples of these countries. ³¹But because of your great kindness, you did not let them be destroyed, nor did you abandon them, for you are a God of kindness and mercy.

³²Now then, our God, great, powerful and fearsome God, you who keep your covenant and your love, take into account this misery which has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria to the present day.

³³You have shown yourself just in all that has happened, for you have faithfully fulfilled your promises, but we have acted wickedly.

³⁴Our kings and leaders, our priests and our fathers did not keep your Law, they did not follow your commandments or the norms you gave them.

³⁵While they were in their kingdoms, enjoying the prosperity that came from you and the very fertile and wide land you had prepared for them, they did not serve you nor did

they turn away from their wicked deeds.

³⁶See, we are now slaves, enslaved in the land you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruits and its goodness.

³⁷The abundant fruits of the land go to the kings you have set over us because of our sins. They do what they please with us and our livestock, and because of this we live in great distress."

Promises made by the community

10 • ¹In accordance with all this, we make a firm commitment in writing. The document has been signed by our leaders, our Levites and our priests.

²Nehemiah son of Hacaliah son of Zedekiah, ³Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, ⁴Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, ⁵Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, ⁶Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, ⁷Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, ⁸Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, ⁹Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these are the priests.

¹⁰Then the Levites: Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the clan of Henadad, Kadmiel, ¹¹and their kinsmen Shebaniah, Hodaviah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, ¹²Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, ¹³Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, ¹⁴Hodiah, Bani, Chenani.

¹⁵The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, ¹⁶Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, ¹⁷Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, ¹⁸Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, ¹⁹Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, ²⁰Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, ²¹Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, ²²Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, ²³Pelataiah, Hanan, Anaiah, ²⁴Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, ²⁵Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, ²⁶Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, ²⁷Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, ²⁸Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

²⁹And the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites, the gatekeepers, singers and helpers and all who have separated themselves from the inhabitants of the land to follow the Law of God together with their wives and their children who are old enough to understand, all these ³⁰with their leaders and their

• **10.1** The following chapters combine various documents. Among them, note the text referring to Nehemiah's first mission: 12:27-43. It complements chapters 1 through 7.

brothers have sworn to walk according to the Law of God promulgated through Moses, the servant of God, and to keep and fulfill all the precepts of Yahweh, our God, and his decisions and laws.

³¹We decided not to give our daughters in marriage to the men of the land nor take their daughters as wives for our sons. ³²If the people of the land bring goods or any foodstuff whatsoever to sell on the sabbath day, we will not buy anything from them on the sabbath day or on any other sacred feast day. We will leave our fields uncultivated in the seventh year, and cancel all debts owed to us.

³³We consider it our obligation to give one third of a shekel yearly for the service of the House of Yahweh, ³⁴for the show-bread, for perpetual food offering and the holocaust, for the sacrifices on the sabbath, on the new moon, on feasts for other sacrifices, for the expiation of the sin of Israel and for everything necessary in the House of God.

³⁵Among the priests, Levites and people of the town, we have drawn lots for the offering of firewood that each family shall bring by turn to the House of Yahweh every year to keep the fire burning at the altar of Yahweh, our God, as it is written in the Law.

³⁶We will bring the first fruits of our fields and of our fruit trees to the House of Yahweh through all the years. ³⁷Our first-born sons and the first-born of our animals, as it is written in the Law, the first-born of our cattle and sheep we will set aside for the House of Yahweh and for the priests who serve in the House of our God. ³⁸We will bring the best of our cereals, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil to the priests to be kept in the chambers of the House of our God; we will also bring the tithes from our fields for the Levites. The Levites themselves will collect the tithes from all the agricultural towns. ³⁹A priest, a son of Aaron, will go with them when they collect the tithes. The Levites will bring the tenth part of the tithes into the storage rooms of the House of God where the treasures are kept, ⁴⁰since the Israelites and the Levites bring to these storage rooms what they owe in wheat, wine and oil. In these rooms are also found the supplies for the Sanctuary, for the priests who are

on duty, and for the gatekeepers and the singers.

So we will no longer neglect the House of our God.

11 ¹The leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people drew lots so that for every ten men, one would live in Jerusalem, the Holy City, with the remaining nine settling in other cities. ²The people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

³These are the provincial leaders who resided in Jerusalem. And in the cities of Judah, everyone settled on his property, in the city of his family: the people of Israel and their priests and Levites, ministers and the sons of the servants of Solomon.

The Jewish population in Jerusalem

⁴In Jerusalem there lived some of the tribe of Judah and some of the tribe of Benjamin.

Of the tribe of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziyah, grandson of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Sephatiah, son of Mehalalel, of the descendants of Perez; ⁵Maaseiah son of Baruch, grandson of Colhozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, descendant of Shelah. ⁶The total number of the descendants of Perez living in Jerusalem was four hundred and sixty-eight adult men.

⁷These belonged to the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, grandson of Joed, son of Pedaiyah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiyah, ⁸and his brothers Gabbai, Sallai: nine hundred twenty-eight.

⁹Joel son of Zichri was their leader, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city.

¹⁰Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joiakin, son of Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, ¹¹grandson of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, who was the High Priest, ¹²and his kinsmen who were responsible for the Temple liturgy: eight hundred and twenty-two; Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, ¹³and his kinsmen, heads of families: two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai son of Azarel, grand-

9:2

9:4-17

13:1

Num
15:19;
Lev
27:21

Num
18:21;
18:24

son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, ¹⁴and his kinsmen, adult men: one hundred and twenty-eight.

Zabdiel son of Haggadolim was in charge of them.

¹⁵Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, grandson of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni, ¹⁶Shabbethai and Jozabad, the levitical leaders responsible for the outside work of the Temple of God; ¹⁷Mattaniah son of Mica, grandson of Zabdi, son of Asaph, who directed the hymns and, at prayer, intoned the thanksgiving; Bakbukiah, the second in rank among his kinsmen; and Abda son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. ¹⁸The total number of Levites in the holy city: two hundred and eighty-four.

¹⁹The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and their kinsmen, who kept watch at the gates: one hundred and seventy-two.

²¹The workmen lived at Ophel; Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of the workmen. ²²The head of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, grandson of Hashbiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, he belonged to the clan of Asaph who were responsible for the chanted parts of the liturgy in the Temple of God; ²³there were royal regulations stating how the clans should take turns in leading the Temple music each day. ²⁴Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, belonging to the clan of Zerah and the tribe of Judah, was the king's commissioner for all such matters as concerned the people.

²⁰The rest of the Israelites, priests and Levites made their homes throughout the towns of Judah, each man in his own inheritance, ²⁵and in the villages situated in rural districts of their own fields.

Some of the tribe of Judah made their homes in Kiriatharba and its outlying villages, in Dibon and its outlying villages, in Jekabzeel and its outlying villages, ²⁶in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet, ²⁷Hazarshual, in Beersheba and its villages, ²⁸in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, ²⁹in Enrimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, ³⁰Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. Thus, they settled from Beersheba as far as the Valley of Hinnom.

³¹Some of the tribe of Benjamin made their homes in Geba, Michmash, Aija, in Bethel and its villages, ³²Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, ³³Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, ³⁴Ha-

did, Zeboim, Neballat, ³⁵Lod and Ono, and the Valley of the Craftsmen.

³⁶Some groups of Levites settled in Judah as well as in Benjamin.

12 ¹These are the priests and the Levites who came back with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and with the High Priest Jeshua:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, ²Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, ³Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, ⁴Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijai, ⁵Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, ⁶Shemaiah; also: Joiarib, Jedaiah, ⁷a Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah.

⁸And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, Mattaniah—the latter with his kinsmen, directed the hymns of thanksgiving ⁹while Bakbukiah, Unno and their kinsmen in their respective groups formed an alternate choir.

^{7b}These were the heads of the priests and of their kinsmen in the days of Jeshua.

¹⁰Jeshua was the father of Joiakim father of Eliashib, Eliashib father of Joiada, ¹¹Joiada father of Johanan, and Johanan father of Jaddua.

¹²In the days when Joiakim was High Priest the heads of the priestly clans were: clan of ¹³Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; ¹⁴of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; ¹⁵of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; ¹⁶of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; ¹⁷of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin...; of Moadiah, Piltai; ¹⁸of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; ¹⁹also: of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; ²⁰of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; ²¹of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

²²In the days of the High Priests Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, the heads of the priestly families were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles up to the reign of Darius the Persian.

²³The sons of Levi.

²⁴The heads of the Levite families were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles, but only up to the time of Johanan, grandson of Eliashib.

The heads of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel; and their kinsmen forming an alternate choir for the hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

ing, in accordance with the instructions of David the man of God, in alternating groups. ²⁵Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers and stood guard at the storehouses near the gates.

²⁶These lived in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, grandson of Jozadak and in the days of Nehemiah, the governor and of Ezra, priest and scholar of the Law.

Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem

²⁷When the wall of Jerusalem was inaugurated, the Levites were summoned from all the places where they lived and they came to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with joy, with songs of thanksgiving, with the music of cymbals and zithers. ²⁸The singers from the neighboring regions and from the villages of Neotophath, ²⁹Beth-gilgal and the districts of Geba and Azmaveth gathered together in Jerusalem, because the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and then purified the people, the gates and the wall.

³¹I then ordered the leaders of Judah to stand on top of the wall and I organized two grand choirs. The first advanced on top of the wall in the southern part, facing the Gate of the Garbage Dump; ³²behind them went Hoshaiah and half the leaders of the Jews, ³³and also Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, ³⁴Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah and Jeremiah, ³⁵the priests and then the musicians with the trumpets came: Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, ³⁶with his brothers, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, Hanani, carrying the musical instruments of David, the man of God. Ezra, the teacher of the Law, went in front of them.

³⁷They went straight on up to the Fountain Gate, near the steps of the City of David, along the top of the wall of the house of David, as far as the Water Gate, on the east.

³⁸The second choir marched to the left: I followed it with half the leaders of the people along the top of the wall, passing through the Tower of the Furnaces and as far as the Wide Wall, ³⁹over the Gate of Ephraim, the Fish Gate, the

Tower of Hananel, as far as the Sheep Gate, and we stopped at the Watch Gate.

⁴⁰Then the two choirs took their places in the House of God. Half of the counselors ⁴¹and the priests Eliakim, ⁴²Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, who were carrying the trumpets, were at my side, together with Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. The singers chanted their songs under the direction of Jezrahiah.

⁴³Great sacrifices were offered that day and the people rejoiced, for God had bestowed great joy on them; the women and the children also participated in the feast. And the shouts of joy of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

⁴⁴At that time, supervisors were appointed to guard the storage rooms where the contributions, the firstfruits and the tithes were kept. They were to store in them the portions from the different cities of the territory required by the Law for the priests and Levites. For the people of Judah rejoiced to see the priests and Levites doing their duty.

⁴⁵They performed the liturgy of their God and the ceremonies of purification with the singers and the gatekeepers, as commanded by David and his son Solomon. ⁴⁶For from the beginning, from the days of David and Asaph, there had been song leaders and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

⁴⁷The whole of Israel, in the time of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, gave the singers and the gatekeepers what was necessary for each day. The sacred objects were entrusted to the Levites, and what was for the sons of Aaron was given to them.

13 ¹At that time, the book of the Law of Moses was read in the presence of the people, and they found this written in it: “The Ammonite and Moabite will never enter the assembly of God, ²for they did not welcome the Israelites with bread and water. They gave money to Balaam to curse them, but our God turned their curse into a blessing.” ³When they heard this Law, they excluded from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Dt 23:4-6

Num 22-24

10

Second mission of Nehemiah

⁴Before this, the priest Eliashib had been caretaker of the chambers of the

House of God. Since he was related to Tobiah, ⁵he had allotted to him a spacious chamber which used to be the storage room for the offerings, incense, utensils, tithes of the wheat, wine and oil, that is, for what belonged to the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

⁶I was not in Jerusalem when this happened, because in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had gone to see the king. Then after some time, the king allowed me to return. ⁷I returned to Jerusalem and I was informed of the evil Eliashib had done just to please Tobiah, allotting to him a chamber inside the court to the House of God. ⁸This made me very angry. So I threw all of Tobiah's furniture out of the chamber and ⁹ordered the chamber to be purified, and had the utensils of the House of God, the offerings and the incense put back in place.

Nehemiah opposes several abuses

• ¹⁰I also learned that the portions were not given to the Levites. And because of this, the Levites and the singers in charge of the ceremonies had gone back to their fields. ¹¹I was angry with the counselors and said to them, "Why is the House of God abandoned?" Then I gathered together the Levites and the singers, and sent them back to work according to their respective duties.

¹²With this, all the Jews turned over to the storehouses the tenth part of their wheat, wine and oil. ¹³I entrusted the administration of the storehouses to the priest Shelemiah, to the teacher of the Law Zadok, to the Levite Pedaiah, and to Hanan, son of Zaccur, as assistant. I appointed them since they were regarded as responsible men. Their work con-

sisted in distributing the food to their brothers.

¹⁴My God, remember the things I have done. Do not forget the good works I did for your House and its ceremonies.

¹⁵In those days, I found men of Judah working in the winepress on the sabbath. Others took sheaves of wheat and loaded them on their asses together with wine, grapes, figs and every kind of produce they wanted to bring into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. I reprimanded them as they were selling their produce.

¹⁶Some Tyrians who had settled in Jerusalem brought in fish and every sort of merchandise to sell to the Jews on the Sabbath day. ¹⁷So I reprimanded the leaders of Judah, saying to them, "You have done great evil by not respecting the sabbath day.

¹⁸When your ancestors did not observe the sabbath, our God brought all those misfortunes on us and on this city. You increase the wrath of God against Israel by not respecting his sabbaths."

¹⁹So I ordered that as the shadows were falling on the gates of Jerusalem in the evening before the sabbath, the gates were to be closed and not to be opened until after the sabbath was over. Moreover, I also stationed some of my men by the gates so that no goods would be brought in on the sabbath day.

²⁰Once or twice, some merchants who sold every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem, ²¹but I warned them, saying, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? Do this again, and I shall use force against you." From then on, they did not return any more on the sabbath day. ²²I also ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to come and guard the gates in order to sanctify the sabbath. For this, too, re-

• **13.10** In this last chapter Nehemiah intervenes so that the law adopted by Ezra will be respected, and thus he takes new and more drastic measures (observance of the Sabbath, racial and religious purification, etc.). This attitude had great advantages; thanks to organization and solidarity among the Jews, the people of God were able to survive and not wander away from their faith.

However, we can also see the problems on which the Gospel will stumble: attachment to

the past, fanaticism for sacred places, and aggressive action against non-conformists. It is a fact that in the following centuries, the religious consciousness of the Jews developed more through contacts with the Greek culture than through their efforts at inner organization.

If we want to be faithful to the biblical message, Christian communities and the Church at large will have to seek growth by opening up to and facing the world.

member me, my God, and have pity on me according to your great mercy.

²³In those days, I also saw that some Jews had remarried Ashdodite, Ammonite and Moabite women, ²⁴and half of their children spoke Ashdodite and did not know our own language. ²⁵I reprimanded them and cursed them; I had some of them flogged and tore out their hair, and made them swear in the name of Yahweh, saying to them: "You shall not marry your daughters to the sons of those people, nor take any of their daughters as wife, neither you nor your sons. ²⁶Did Solomon, king of Israel, not sin in this? Among the many nations, there had not been a king like him. He was loved by God, and God made him king of all Israel. But foreign women also

made him sin. ²⁷Will it also be said of you that you committed the same grave crime by rebelling against our God in marrying foreign women?"

²⁸I also sent away from my side one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, who was the son-in-law of Sanballat, the Horonite. ²⁹Remember this people, my God, for they defiled the priesthood and your covenant with the priests and Levites.

³⁰So I purified them from everything foreign. And I established regulations for the priests and the Levites, defining the tasks of everyone. ³¹I also fixed the time for the wood offering and for the first-fruits.

Remember me, my God, for my good!