

Nehemiah

Return to Me



Last week...

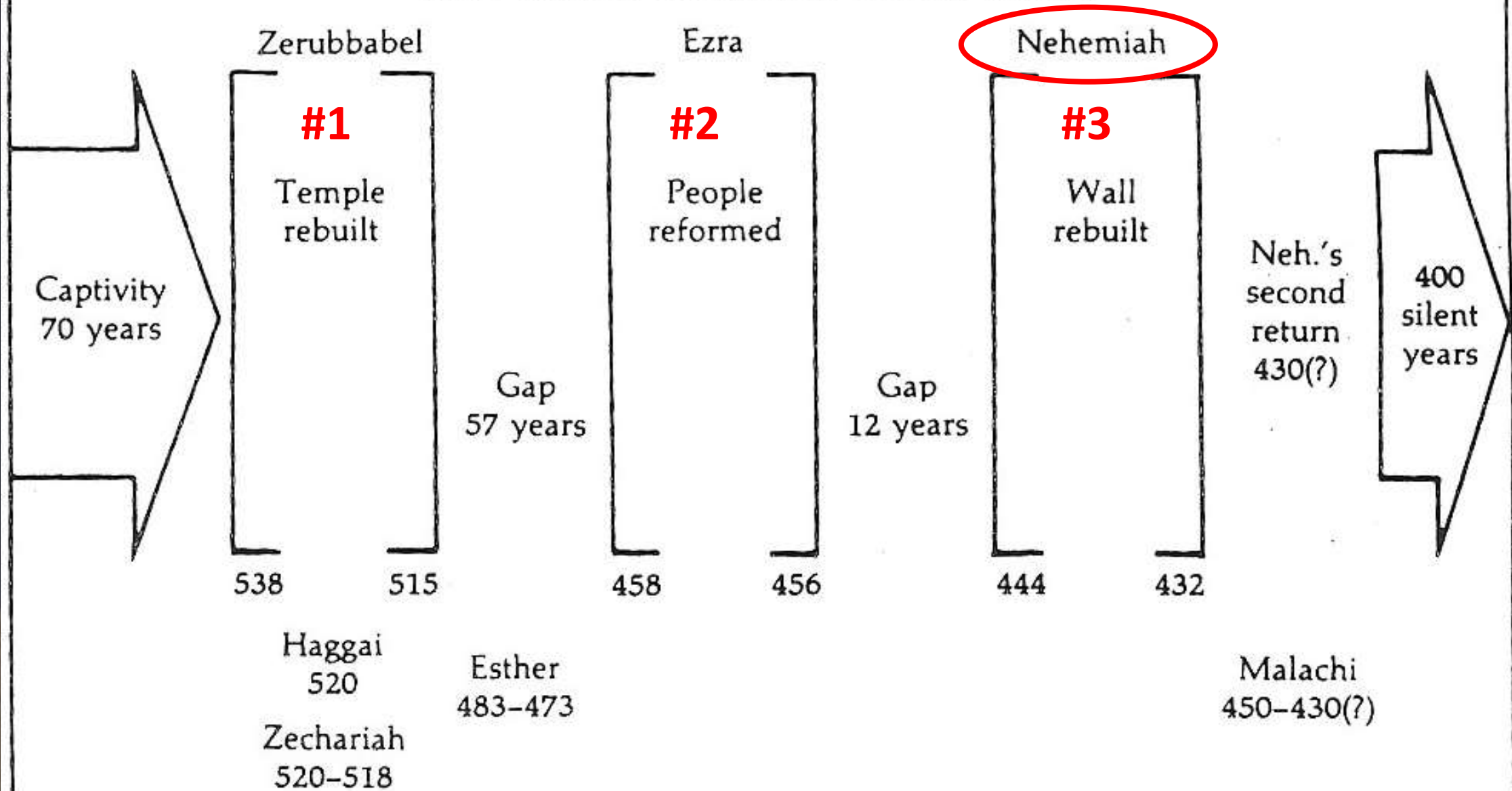
Nehemiah chapter 1

They [visitors] 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.”

Nehemiah 1:3

*This left the city defenseless against enemy attacks.

The Three Returns from Exile



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. Nehemiah 1:4

* Nehemiah's response to hearing the news is indicative of his awareness that God was calling him to a completely new sphere of service, for which his position and training had uniquely prepared him. – New Bible Commentary

Nehemiah prayed... “Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; 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.**’” Nehemiah 1:8-9

Nehemiah prayed... “They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. 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.” Nehemiah 1:10-11a

*Humanly speaking only one person could make it possible for Nehemiah to help the Jews in Jerusalem—the king he served. Years earlier, Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the construction work in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21), and he was the only one who could reverse that order. That is why Nehemiah prayed specifically, Give Your servant (cf. v. 6) success today by granting him favor (lit., “compassion”) in the presence of this man. Nehemiah was referring of course to King Artaxerxes (cf. 2:1). A favorable relationship with the king could open the door for his petition. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

Nehemiah Chapters 2-3

And it came about in the month Nisan
[4 months after Nehemiah's visitors arrived
in chapter 1], in the twentieth year of King
Artaxerxes [444 BC], that wine was before
him, and I took up the wine and gave it to
the king [Artaxerxes]. Now I had not been
sad in his presence. Nehemiah 2:1

Now I was the **cupbearer** to the king. Nehemiah 1:11b

Cupbearer - an officer of high rank with Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, and Jewish monarchs. The cup-bearer of the king of Egypt is mentioned in connection with Joseph's history (Gen. 40:1–21; 41:9). Rabshakeh was cup-bearer in the Assyrian court (2 Kings 18:17). Nehemiah filled this office to the king of Persia (Neh. 1:11). We read also of Solomon's cup-bearers (1 Kings 10:5; 2 Chr. 9:4).

– Easton's Bible Dictionary

Cupbearer - a confidant in a royal entourage (1 Kings 10:5). The cupbearer could exercise influence on a king's policies (Neh. 1:11-2:8). The first servant of the Pharaoh imprisoned with Joseph had held the Pharaoh's cup 'in my hand ...' (Gen. 40:11), suggesting that the cupbearer carried responsibility for nurturing (giving food and drink to) those in his care. The term also refers to God in His nurturing relationship with creation (Ps. 104:13). – Harper's Bible Dictionary

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. I said to the king, “Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city [Jerusalem], the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?” Nehemiah 2:2-3

*Seventy-one years before (in 515 BC), the Temple had been rebuilt. The year was now 444 BC; yet the city itself still needed much rebuilding. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. 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.” Nehemiah 2:4-5

*Remember that a few years earlier King Artaxerxes had stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4:17-24) and now Nehemiah was going to ask that the order be reversed.

Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him [showing it was a private gathering, not a public event], “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. Nehemiah 2:6

*Nehemiah has been praying and planning for 4 months for this conversation

The Persian Empire



**Distance from Susa to Jerusalem
is approx. 1,678 miles.**

Susa, also known as Shushan, the ancient capital of Elam (the southwestern area of modern Iran), which reached its height of importance as the residence and especially the winter capital of the kings of Persia. Called 'Susa the capital' in Esther 1:2 (and Neh. 1:1), it provides the setting for the story of Esther and Mordecai. Daniel is also placed in Shushan during the reign of Belshazzar (Dan. 8:2).

And I said to the king, “If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the [Euphrates] River, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, 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. Nehemiah 2:7-8

- Nehemiah asked for letters of introduction to governors along the way. This would pave a path of friendly leaders between Jerusalem and Susa. It would also minimize the potential of other governors siding with detractors if they know that the King is authorizing the reconstruction of the walls. It also build relationships Nehemiah could count on. Nehemiah requested wood from the King's forest. Since the gates were made from wood and they were all burned and unusable, new wood would be the major expense for the new construction. Also it appears that Nehemiah ordered wood for the construction of a lodging for himself in Jerusalem.

- www.growingdisciples.org/Studies/Nehemiah2QA.htm

- This is a fine illustration of the balance between confidence in the sovereignty of God, with prayer as its proper response, and human responsibility, with its counterpart in thoughtful planning.

– New Bible Commentary

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” Daniel 9:25-27

*This decree was issued March 5, 444 BC. Daniel had prophesied 95 years earlier in 539 BC.

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. 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. Nehemiah 2:9-10

* The journey to Jerusalem, even though Nehemiah probably took the shortest route possible, would have taken at least two months. Ezra's trip, 14 years earlier, took four to five months (Ezra 7:8–9).

Who was Sanballat the Horonite?

Akkadian personal name meaning “Sin (the god) has healed.” According to the Elephantine Papyri from the reign of Darius I, Sanballat was governor of Samaria around 407 BC. He had sons whose names included the term “Yahweh,” for the God of Israel. Although addressed by his Babylonian name (probably acquired during the exile), Sanballat was a practicing Jew. His daughter was married to the grandson of Jerusalem’s high priest (Neh. 13:28), indicating harmonious relations between Judah and Samaria at that time. Nehemiah referred to Sanballat as the “Horonite,” suggesting a connection with Upper or Lower Beth-horon. (Neh. 2:10). These cities controlled the major highway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea. If Sanballat had influence with these towns, he could greatly affect Jerusalem’s economy. Sanballat, in league with Tobiah and Shemaiah, opposed Nehemiah’s rebuilding of Jerusalem. If the Holy City regained prominence, it would erode the powers of the surrounding cities. The struggle appears to have been more political than racial or religious. – Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Who was Tobiah the Ammonite?

- Name meaning 'Yahweh is good'; an opponent of Nehemiah (Neh. 2:10, 19; 4:3, 7; 6:1–19; 13:4–8) with Sanballat and Geshem. He is described as 'the Ammonite' and also (Neh. 2:10, 19) as 'the servant.' These descriptions suggest a derogatory attitude, but 'servant' may indicate high office (i.e., 'servant of the [Persian] king'; cf. 2 Kings 22:12). 'Ammonite' may indicate his origin or be a nickname; more probably it indicates his responsibility for that area, placing him alongside Sanballat, who was governor of Samaria, and Geshem, who could have been the Arab ruler of Qedar. All three would then occupy important positions under Persian authority. They show general opposition to the restoration of Jerusalem in the late sixth-early fifth centuries BC (Neh. 2:10–20; 4:19). Tobiah and Sanballat are associated with an attempt to get Nehemiah to act sacrilegiously (Neh. 6:10–14); Tobiah is shown as in high favor with leading men in Jerusalem, bound to him by marriage relationships (Neh. 6:15–19). During Nehemiah's absence in Babylon, Eliashib the priest gave Tobiah a special room in the Temple, from which Nehemiah ejected him (Neh. 13:4–9). It is clear that Tobiah was a man of considerable influence.— Harper's Bible Dictionary
- He opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem because it would weaken his political authority in the area. – Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days [time to think, plan, pray]. 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.

Nehemiah 2:11-12

*Sometimes we need to obey God without sharing everything publicly

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. Then I passed on to the **Fountain Gate** and the **King's Pool**, but there was no place for my mount to pass. So I went up at night by the ravine [Kidron Valley?] and inspected the wall. Then I entered the **Valley Gate** again and returned.

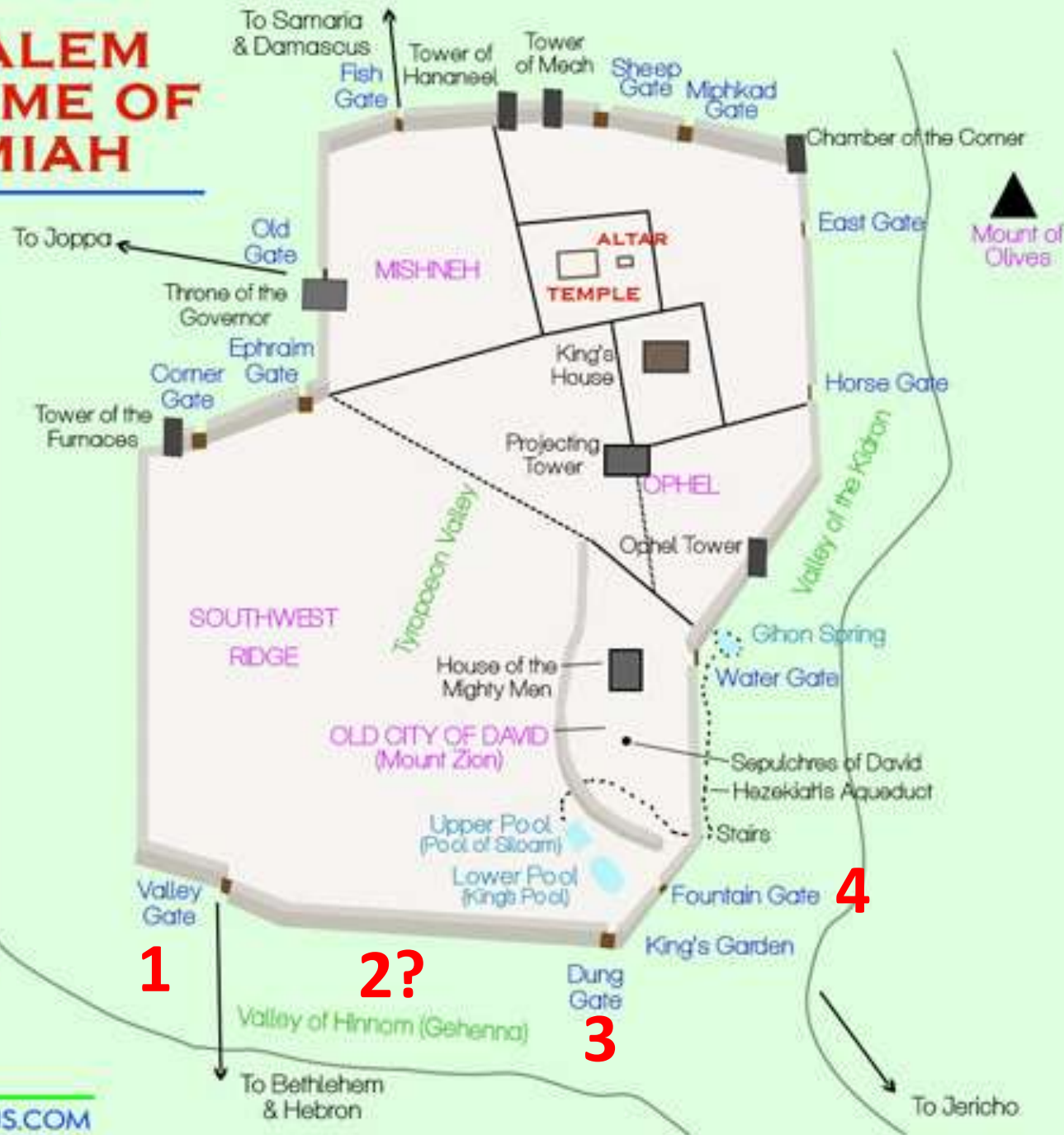
Nehemiah 2:13-15

JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

C. 445 B.C.

BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah was governor of Judah under Artaxerxes I of Persia. He rebuilt Jerusalem during the Second Temple period



Nehemiah's inspections in 2:13-15 occurred during the night on the south side of the city. The eastern wall seems to be the most heavily damaged and would require the most work. He would have come in from the northeast so he already had seen this part of the city as he was coming into town. During the daytime, Nehemiah was establishing his leadership by meeting with community leaders and doing his new civil duties. He would have met with officials and heads of households to get a feeling for what they might contribute without indicating his intention. He had some trusted men who knew his intentions and helped him.

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. 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.” 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. Nehemiah 2:16-18

* Nehemiah understood the poverty that existed and was looking only to ask the people for their labor and not "tax" them for the expenses of the reconstruction. - www.growingdisciples.org/Studies/Nehemiah2QA.htm

A Time to Pray and a Time to Act

“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, ‘You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**’”

James 2:17-18

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?” 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.” Nehemiah 2:19-20

* Will we serve God faithfully and courageously if we are mocked and despised by our neighbors or co-workers?

Who was Geshem the Arab?

- An Arab opponent of Nehemiah who ridiculed the plan to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and subsequently plotted against him (Neh. 2:19; 6:1–9). We may assume that he was the ruler of the Persian province of Arabia, south of Judah. This position may explain his motivation to interfere in Judah's domestic affairs.

– Harper's Bible Dictionary

- Personal name meaning “rain.” Arabian ruler of Kedar who joined Sanballat and Tobiah in opposing Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:19; 6:1–19). His name appears on a silver vessel dedicated by his son Qainu to the goddess Han-Ilath at Tell el-Maskhuta in Lower Egypt. An inscription found in Dedan also appears to describe extensive territories Geshem controlled. He was in name a vassal of Persia but apparently wielded great personal power with tribes in the Syrian Desert, southern Israel, the delta of Egypt, and northern Arabia. He may have hoped to gain further control in Israel and certainly did not want a local power to threaten him there.

– Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Then Eliashib the high priest arose with his brothers the priests and built the **Sheep Gate**; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They consecrated the wall to the **Tower of the Hundred** and the **Tower of Hananel**. Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zaccur the son of Imri built. Now the sons of Hassenaah built the **Fish Gate**; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and bars. Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz made repairs. And next to him Meshullam the son of Berechiah the son of Meshezabel made repairs. And next to him Zadok the son of Baana also made repairs. Moreover, next to him the Tekoites made repairs, but their nobles did not support the work of their masters.

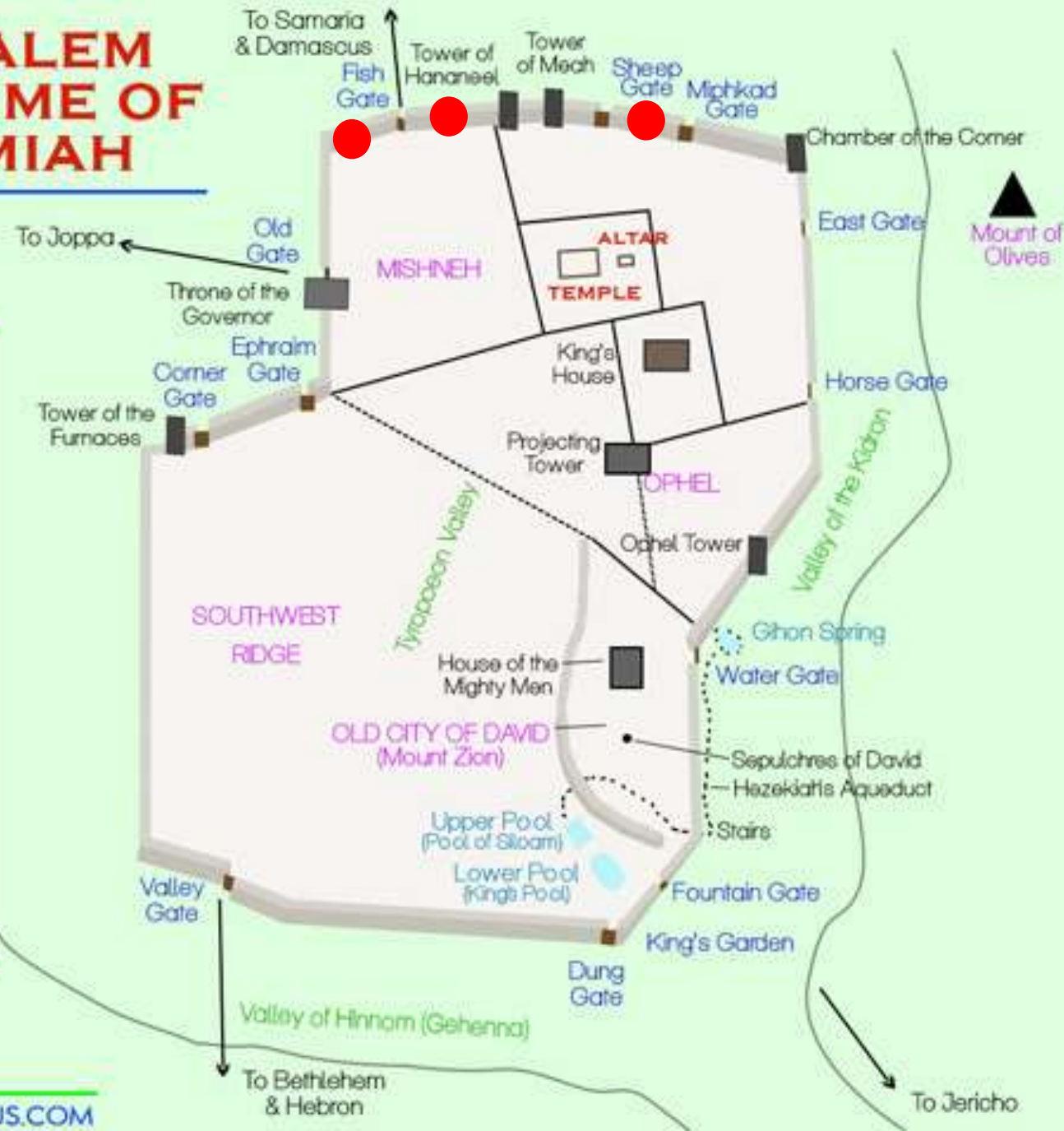
Nehemiah 3:1-5

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Rebuilding
progress

Who was Eliashib the High Priest?

Personal name meaning “God repays or leads back.” The High priest in the time of Nehemiah who led in rebuilding the sheep gate in the Jerusalem wall, a gate through which sheep were led to the nearby temple for sacrifice (Neh. 3:1). His house was built into the city wall (Neh. 3:20). He was the son of Joiakim, grandson of Jeshua and the father of Joiada (Neh. 12:10). His grandson married the daughter of Sanballat, who strongly opposed Nehemiah’s efforts (Neh. 13:28), possibly indicating some tension between Nehemiah and the priestly leaders. He may be the Eliashib whose son had a room in the temple (Ezra 10:6).

– Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

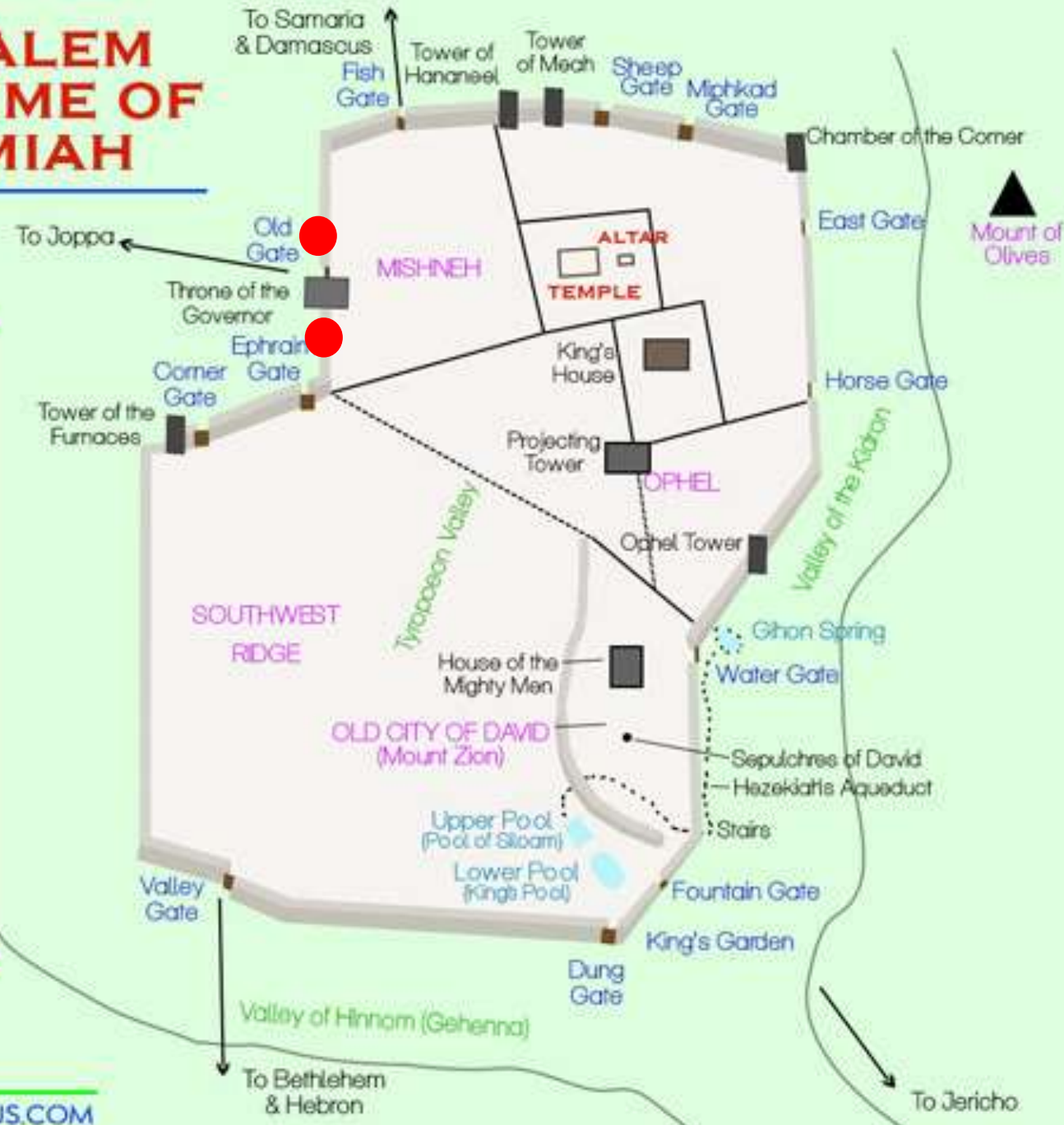
Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the **Old** [Jeshanah] **Gate**; they laid its beams and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. Next to them Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, also made repairs for the official seat of the governor of the province beyond the River. Next to him Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. And next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the **Broad Wall**. Next to them Rephaiah the son of Hur, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. Next to them Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house. And next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. Nehemiah 3:6-10

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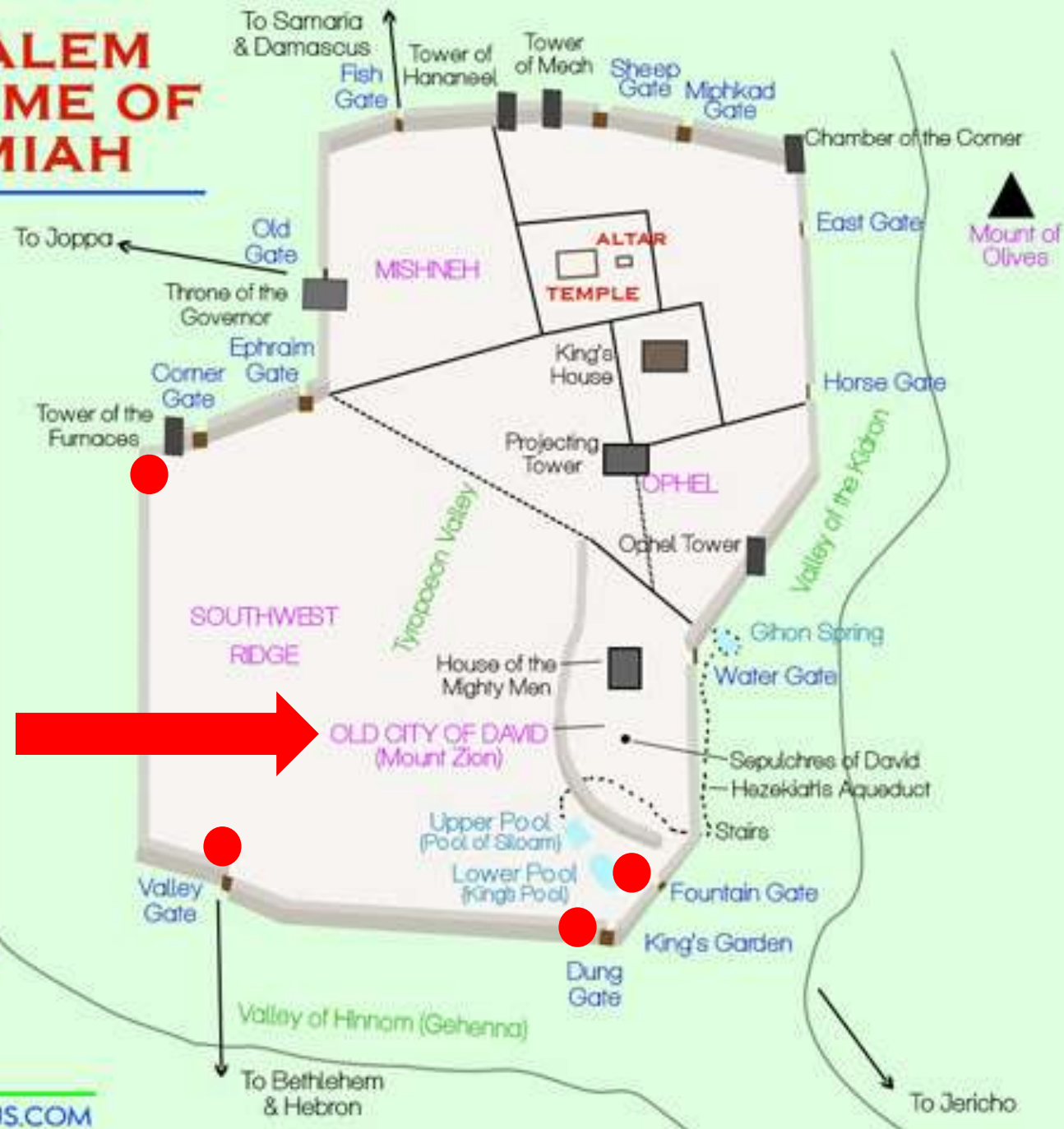
Malchijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-moab repaired another section and the **Tower of Furnaces**. Next to him Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the official of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs, he and his daughters. Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the **Valley Gate**. They built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and a thousand cubits [1,500 feet] of the wall to the **Refuse [Dung] Gate**. Malchijah the son of Rechab, the official of the district of Beth-haccherem repaired the **Refuse Gate**. He built it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars. Shallum the son of Col-hozeh, the official of the district of Mizpah, repaired the **Fountain Gate**. He built it, covered it and hung its doors with its bolts and its bars, and the wall of the **Pool of Shelah** at the **king's garden** as far as the steps that descend from the **city of David**. Nehemiah 3:11-15

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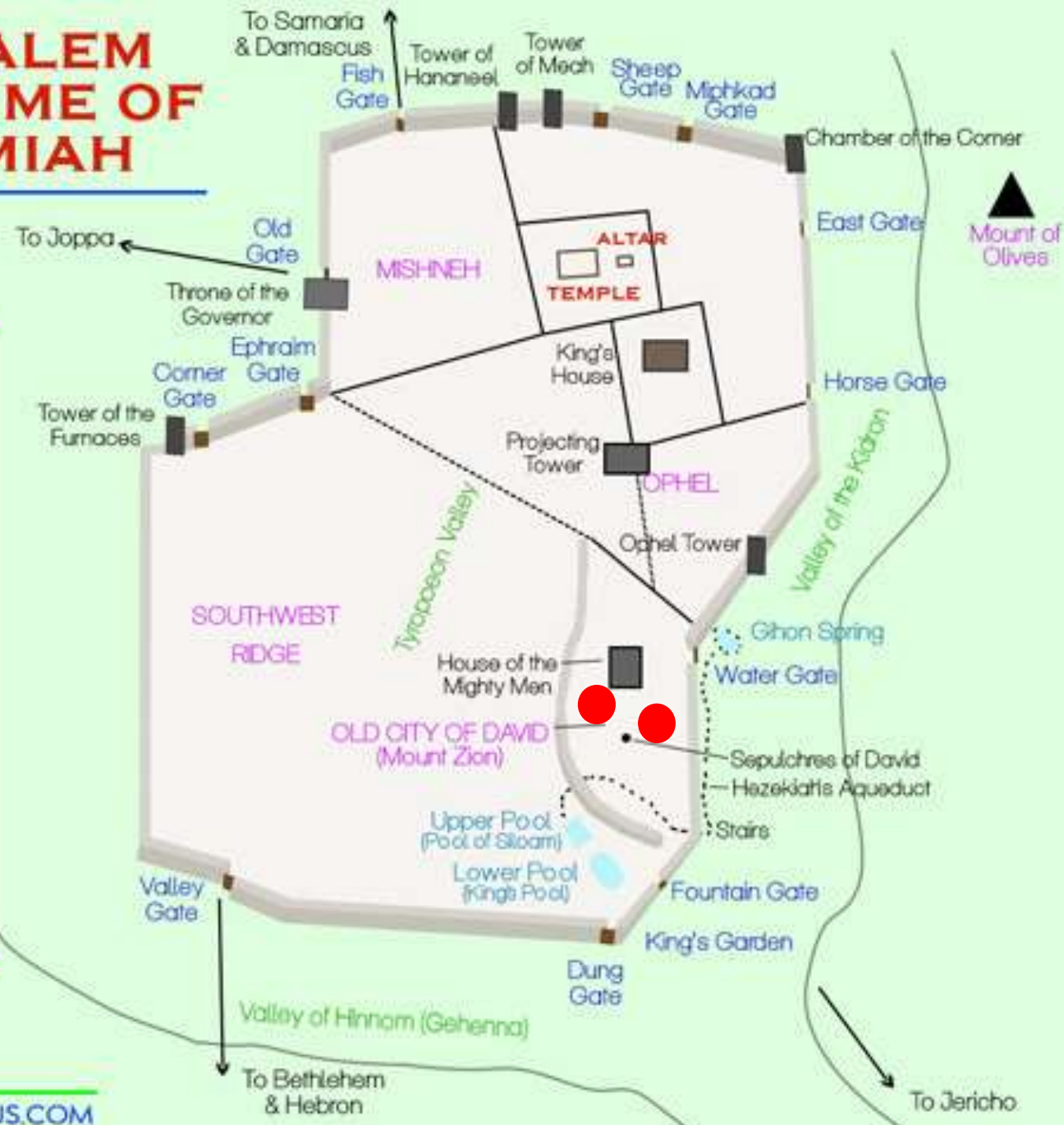
After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, official of half the district of Beth-zur, made repairs as far as a point opposite the **tombs of David**, and as far as the **artificial pool** and the **house of the mighty men**. After him the Levites carried out repairs under Rehum the son of Bani. Next to him Hashabiah, the official of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. After him their brothers carried out repairs under Bavvai the son of Henadad, official of the other half of the district of Keilah. Next to him Ezer the son of Jeshua, the official of Mizpah, repaired another section in front of the **ascent of the armory at the Angle**. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the **Angle** to the doorway of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section, from the doorway of Eliashib's house even as far as the end of his house. Nehemiah 3:16-21

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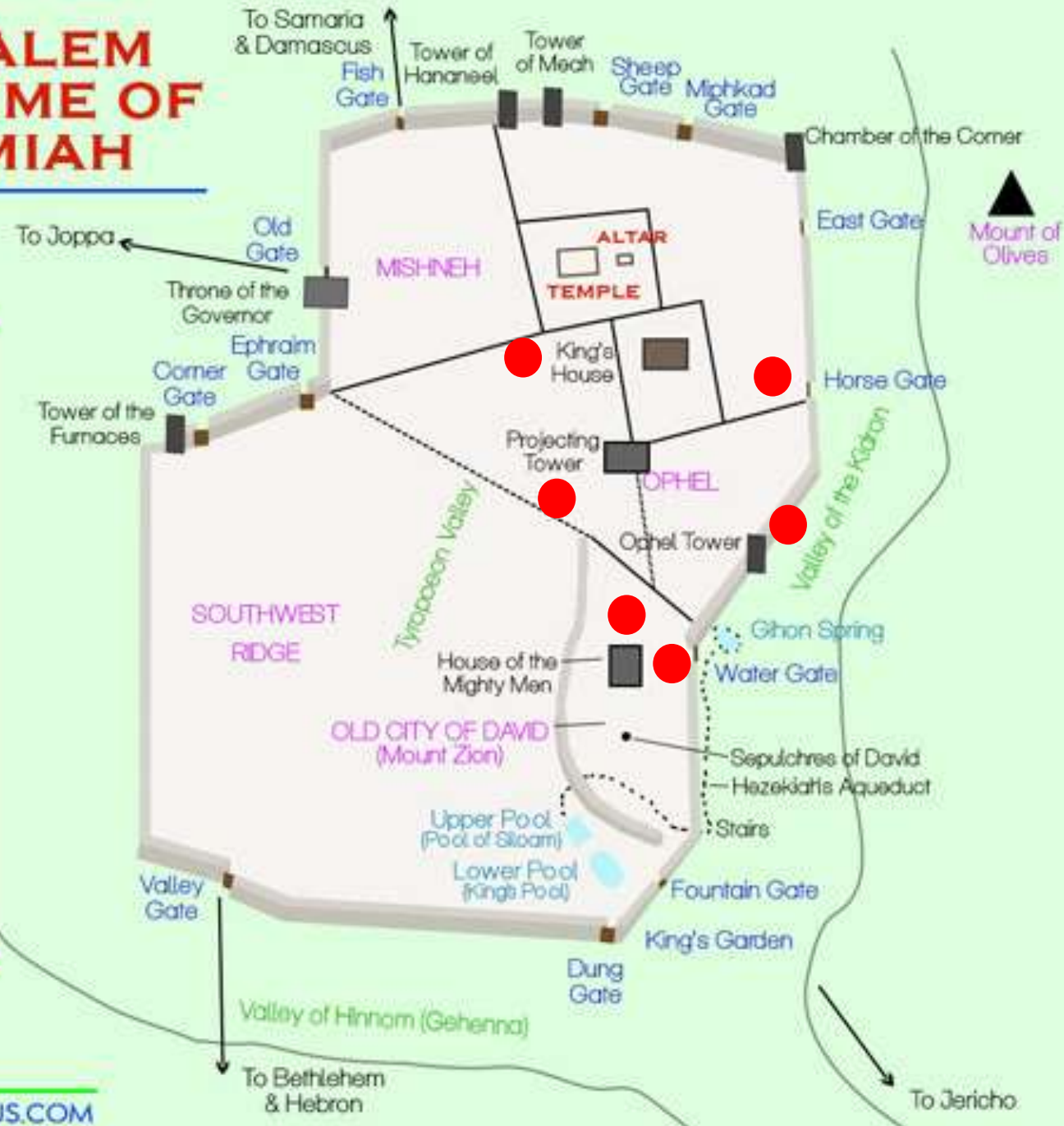
After him the priests, the men of the valley, carried out repairs. After them Benjamin and Hasshub carried out repairs in front of their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, carried out repairs beside his house. After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section, from the house of Azariah as far as the **Angle** and as far as the **corner**. Palal the son of Uzai made repairs in front of the **Angle** and the tower projecting from the **upper house of the king**, which is by the **court of the guard**. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs. The temple servants living in **Ophel** made repairs as far as the front of the **Water Gate** toward the east and the **projecting tower**. After them the Tekoites repaired another section in front of the great **projecting tower** and as far as the wall of **Ophel**. Above the **Horse Gate** the priests carried out repairs, each in front of his house. Nehemiah 3:22-28

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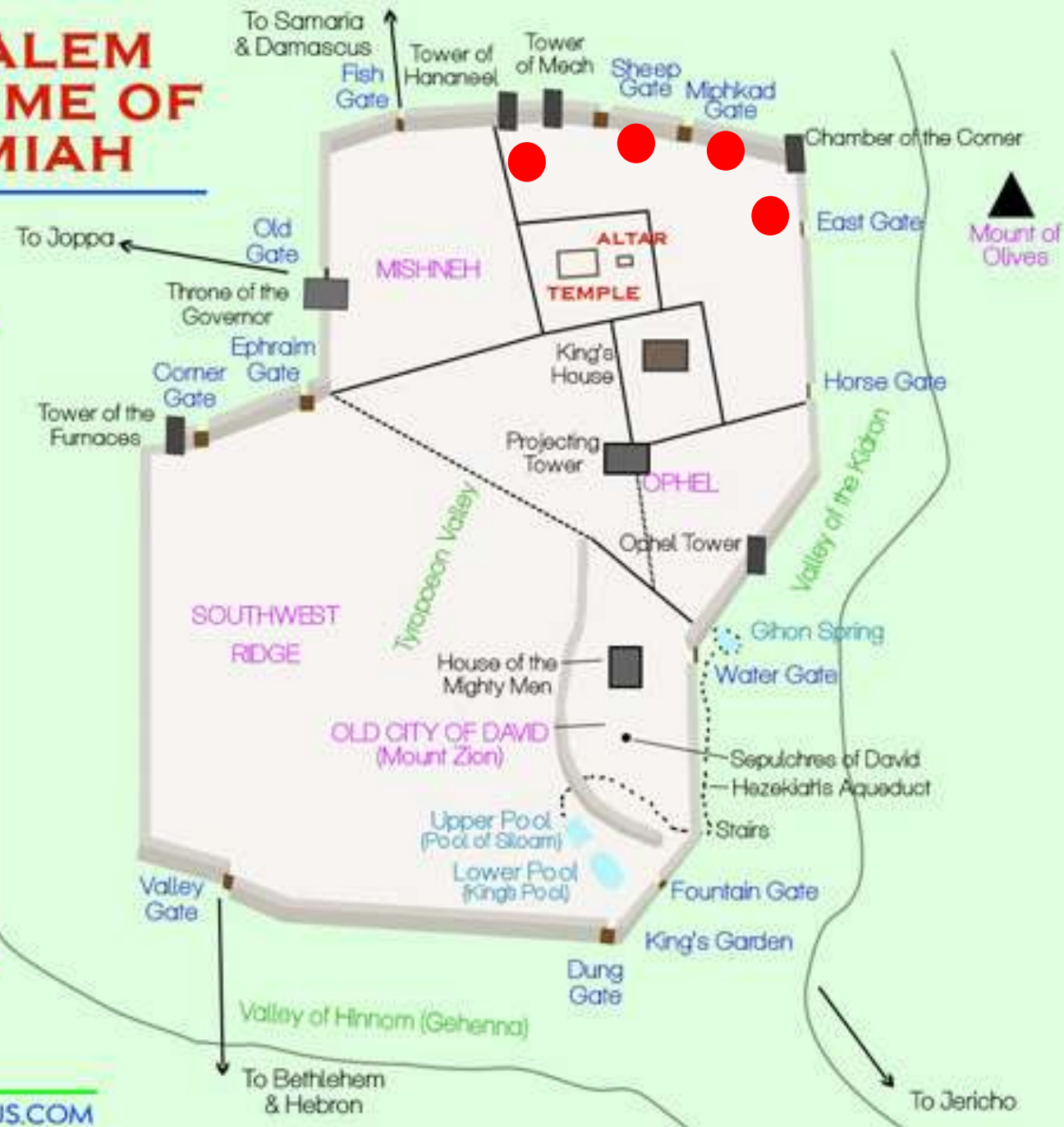
After them Zadok the son of Immer carried out repairs in front of his house. And after him Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the **East Gate**, carried out repairs. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. After him Meshullam the son of Berechiah carried out repairs in front of his own quarters. After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, carried out repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, in front of the **Inspection** [Miphkad] **Gate** and as far as the **upper room of the corner**. Between the **upper room of the corner** and the **Sheep Gate** the goldsmiths and the merchants carried out repairs. Nehemiah 3:29-32

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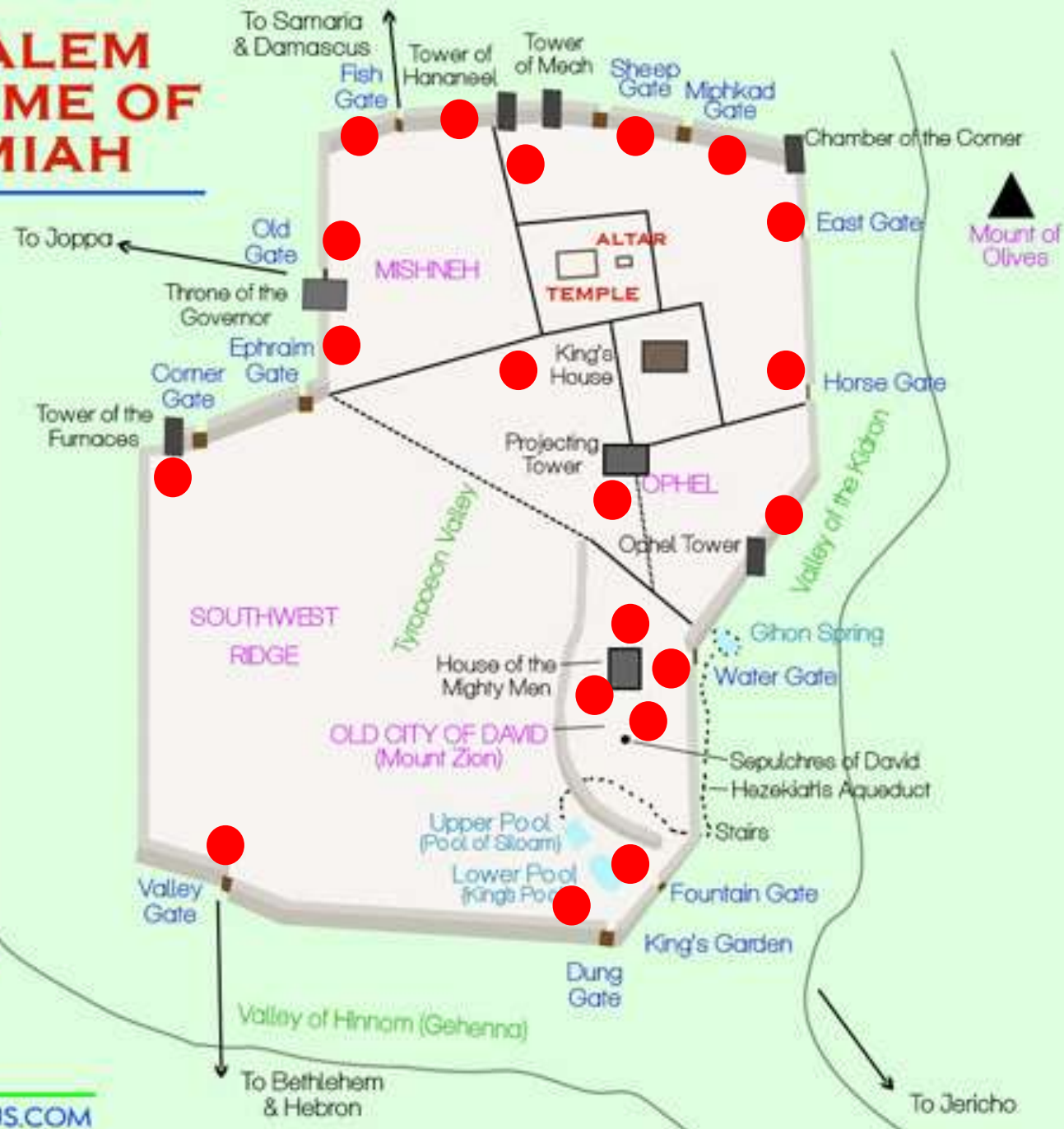
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This was a 360-degree construction project. The descriptions begin with locations in the northeast and move counter-clockwise.

Nehemiah's Genius Construction Strategy

- He assigned everyone a specific place to work. This coordination stands out in the phrases “next to him,” “next to them,” “next to that,” “the next section,” “beside him,” and “beyond them,” which occur 28 times in this chapter.
- Assignments were made near people’s houses (3:21, 23–24, 26, 28–30). People who were assigned to sections of the wall near their homes would be more personally involved and consequently more highly motivated. They would not have to travel to another part of the city to do the job, wasting valuable time. In case of attack they would not be tempted to leave their posts, but would stay and protect their families. The whole task would be a family effort, utilizing all available talent.
- Commuters also had a part. Men whose homes were outside of Jerusalem—in Jericho (v. 2), Tekoa (v. 5, 27), Gibeon (v. 7), and Mizpah (v. 7)—were assigned to sections of the wall where there were few homes. Those workers were asked to complete tasks that would not be as conveniently handled by the permanent residents in Jerusalem.
- Assignments were also made by vocation. The high priest and fellow priests were assigned to rebuild the Sheep Gate (v. 1) because animals were brought through that gate to the temple for sacrifice. Other priests are mentioned in verses 22, 28. Other workers whose vocations are listed include goldsmiths (v. 8, 31–32), perfume-makers (v. 8), district and half-district rulers (v. 9–12, 14–19), Levites (v. 17), and merchants (v. 31–32). Even one man’s daughters were involved (v. 12).

Who worked on the wall?

- Religious priests
- Government officials
- Goldsmiths
- Perfume makers
- Merchants
- Men
- Women

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.
1 Peter 4:10

Donald Campbell's 21 characteristics necessary for Effective Leadership exhibited by Nehemiah

1. Established a reasonable and attainable goal.
2. Had a sense of mission.
3. Was willing to get involved.
4. Rearranged his priorities in order to accomplish his goal.
5. Patiently waited for God's timing.
6. Showed respect to his superior.
7. Prayed at crucial times.
8. Made his request with tact and graciousness.
9. Was well prepared and thought of his needs in advance.
10. Went through proper channels.
11. Took time (three days) to rest, pray, and plan.
12. Investigated the situation firsthand.
13. Informed others only after he knew the size of the problem.
14. Identified himself as one with the people.
15. Set before them a reasonable and attainable goal.
16. Assured them God was in the project.
17. Displayed self-confidence in facing obstacles.
18. Displayed God's confidence in facing obstacles.
19. Did not argue with opponents.
20. Was not discouraged by opposition.
21. Courageously used the authority of his position.

Return to Me

“Therefore say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “**Return to Me,**” declares the Lord of hosts, “**that I may return to you,**” says the Lord of hosts. Zechariah 1:3

Do you need to change course today?