

Nehemiah

Return to Me

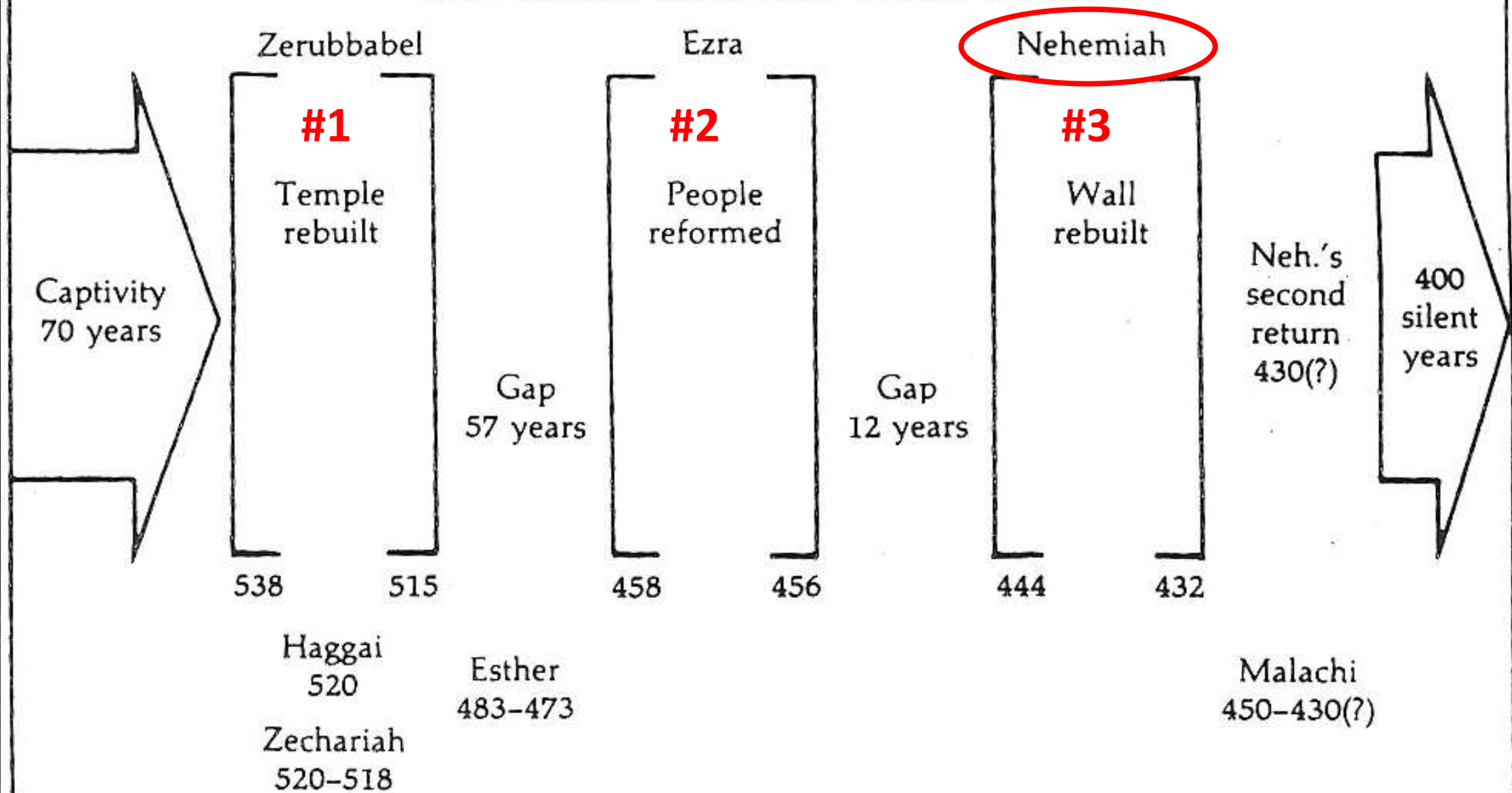
Teaching Series by Pastor Trey Graham

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

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

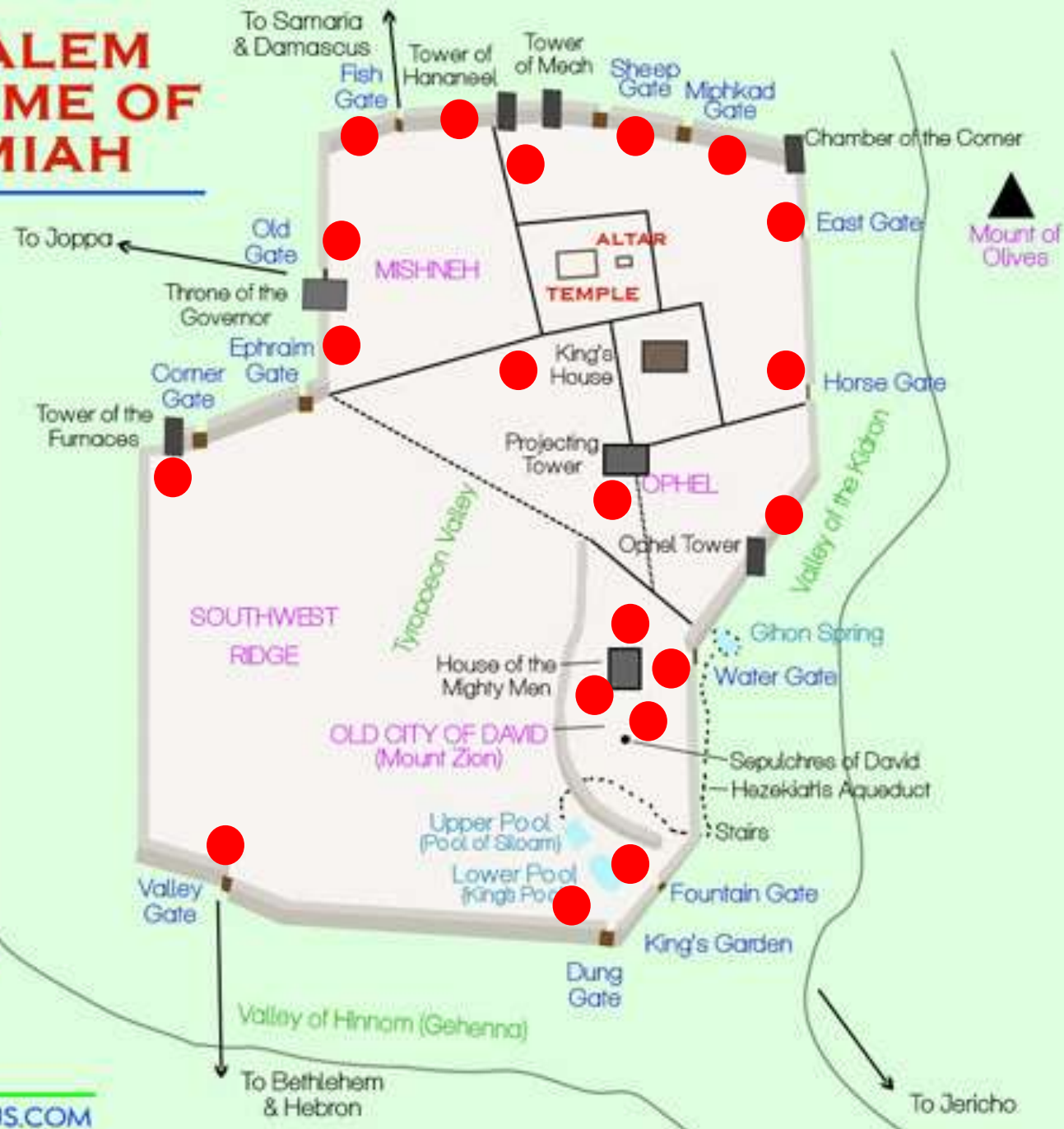
* Nehemiah understood the poverty that existed and was looking only to ask the people for their labor and not "tax" them for the expenses of the reconstruction. - www.growingdisciples.org/Studies/Nehemiah2QA.htm

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.



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

Nehemiah Chapter 4

Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. Nehemiah 4:1

*Why do others get angry when we obey God?

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

He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices [of thanksgiving]? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?” Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!” Nehemiah 4:2-3

*Strategy: demoralize builders and build up opposition

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

[Nehemiah prayed]

Hear, O our God, how we are despised!
Return their reproach on their own heads
and give them up for plunder in a land of
captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity
and let not their sin be blotted out before
You, for they have demoralized the
builders. Nehemiah 4:4-5

Like some of the imprecatory prayers in which the psalmists invoked God's condemnation on His enemies, Nehemiah's prayer in this instance was severe and condemning. He prayed that Sanballat and his cohorts would be taken captive and that they would be judged for their sins.

How should a Christian interpret this kind of praying in view of what Jesus said about praying for one's enemies? (Matt. 5:44) **First**, in opposing the Jews, Sanballat and company were actually opposing God. **Second**, God had already pronounced judgment on Israel's enemies. Nehemiah was praying according to God's will—that God would deliver Jerusalem from her enemies (Josh. 1:5). **Third**, Nehemiah was praying that God would bring about what He had promised Abraham regarding those who curse His people (Gen. 12:3). **Fourth**, vengeance belongs to God, not to Nehemiah or other believers (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). - Bible Knowledge Commentary

What dangers did Nehemiah face?

- His builders would be demoralized by the opposition's mockery
- His builders would be overwhelmed by the scale of the project
- His builders would be distracted by the pleas of family members living in outlying villages

So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 4:6

- *Faithfulness to God is contagious
- *Unfaithfulness to God is contagious
- *Faithfulness to God often takes a long time

Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. Nehemiah 4:7-8

*The enemies of God are often very angry when God's people follow the Lord and live biblically

Facing the Opposition

Joining Sanballat and the Samaritans from the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites from the east, Geshem and the Arabs from the south, were men from Ashdod, a Philistine city, from the west. They all plotted together to attack Jerusalem, apparently from all sides. -Bible Knowledge Commentary

*Have you ever felt surrounded?

When did the opposition increase?

It is noteworthy that each stage of Nehemiah's activity was met with opposition, every time introduced with the formula "when so-and-so heard." As the work progressed, so the opposition grew more fierce and the description of the response more elaborate. - New Bible Commentary

When you are doing a small or insignificant work for the kingdom of God, the enemy of God is not too concerned. As you begin to see real progress, like lives changed and hearts healed, spiritual opposition begins to increase and intensify.

But we prayed to our God, and because of them [enemies] we set up a guard against them day and night. Thus in Judah it was said, “The strength of the burden bearers is failing [physically exhausted], yet there is much rubbish; and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall [psychologically exhausted].”
Nehemiah 4:9-10

Our enemies said, “They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.” Nehemiah 4:11

*The enemies of God’s holy work constantly strive to interfere with and derail God’s people living faithful lives. The extreme result of this opposition is a willingness to kill believers.

When the Jews who lived near them came
and told us ten times, “They will come up
against us from every place where you may
turn,” then I stationed men in the lowest
parts of the space behind the wall, the
exposed places, and I stationed the people in
families with their swords, spears and bows.

Nehemiah 4:12-13

When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them [the enemies]; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.”

Nehemiah 4:14

What are your priorities?

1. God
2. Family
3. Possessions

Nehemiah's Timeout

Sometimes it helps to call a timeout to:

- Rest
- Reflect
- Pray
- Confirm you are on the right spiritual path
- Encourage others
- Reassign people to more urgent tasks



When difficult times come...

**“Do not be afraid of them;
remember the Lord who is
great and awesome.”**

Nehemiah 4:14

When our enemies heard that it [the attack strategy] was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. Nehemiah 4:15

*Know when it is time to pray and wait for God

*Know when it is time to get to work for God

Do you realize that Nehemiah could have had a burdened heart, prayed all day long, built a team, acted courageously and even had a strategy to rebuild the walls but ultimately these would have come to nothing if they were not followed by real and tangible action?

<https://www.slideserve.com/apria/leaders-are-stewards>

What actions do you need to take in your spiritual life?

From that day on, half of my servants
[Nehemiah's personal staff] carried on the work
while half of them held the spears, the shields,
the bows and the breastplates; and the captains
were behind the whole house of Judah. Those
who were rebuilding the wall and those who
carried burdens [bricks and mortar] took their
load with one hand doing the work and the other
holding a weapon [sword]. Nehemiah 4:16-17

A sword and a spear are crossed diagonally on a red, textured carpet. The sword is positioned from the top-left to the bottom-right, with its hilt at the top-left. The spear is positioned from the bottom-left to the top-right, with its tip at the bottom-left. The spearhead is a large, triangular, metallic point. The sword has a long, straight blade and a hilt with a crossguard. The background is a red, textured carpet.

**“one hand doing the
work and the other
holding a weapon”
Nehemiah 4:17**

As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter [ready to sound alarms] stood near me. I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” Nehemiah 4:18-20

God's People Have Faced Struggles Before

- When I saw their fear, I rose and spoke to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people: “Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.” Nehemiah 4:14
- But Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent.” Exodus 14:13-14

God's People Have Faced Struggles Before

- When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work. Nehemiah 4:15
- “The peoples have heard, they tremble; anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; until Your people pass over, O Lord, until the people pass over whom You have purchased. Exodus 15:14-16

God's People Have Faced Struggles Before

- “At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us.” Nehemiah 4:20
- So the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon; and he blew a trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called together to follow him. Judges 6:34

So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared [darkness]. At that time I also said to the people, “Let each man with his servant spend the night within Jerusalem so that they may be a guard for us by night and a laborer by day.” So neither I, my brothers, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us removed our clothes, each took his weapon even to the water.

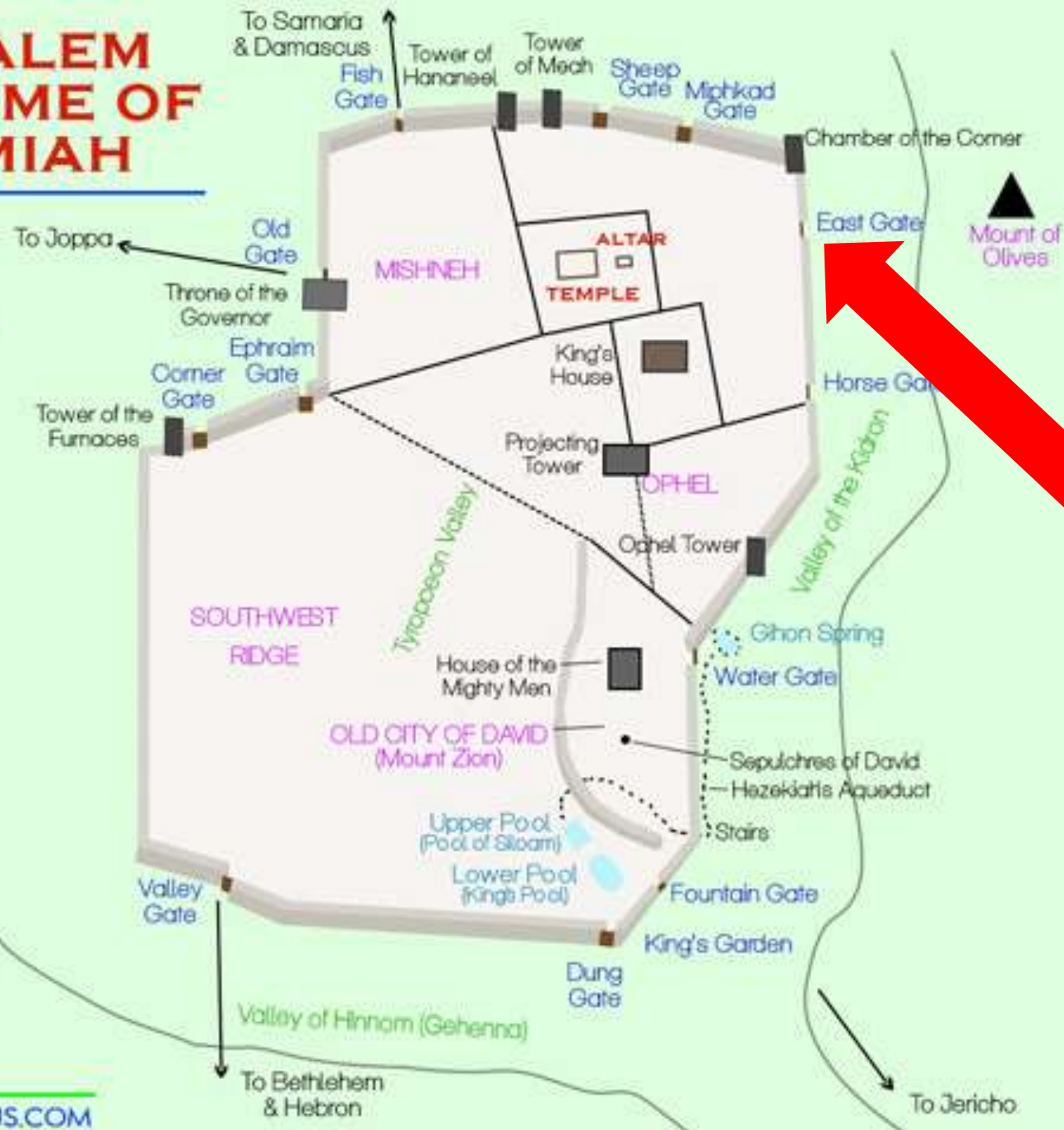
Nehemiah 4:21-23

JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

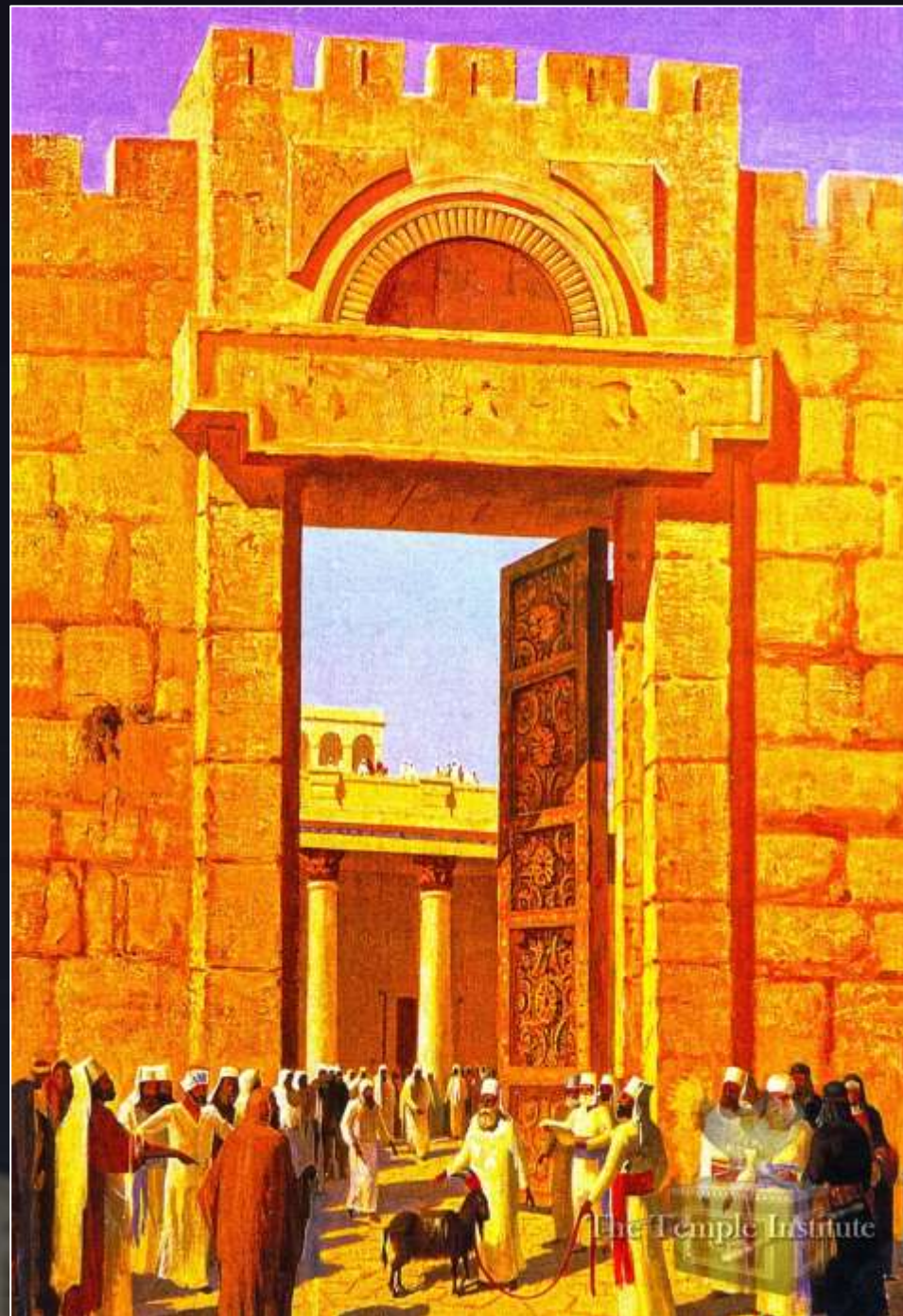
C. 445 B.C.

BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

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



One of the gates to be repaired was the Eastern Gate (see Nehemiah 3:29)

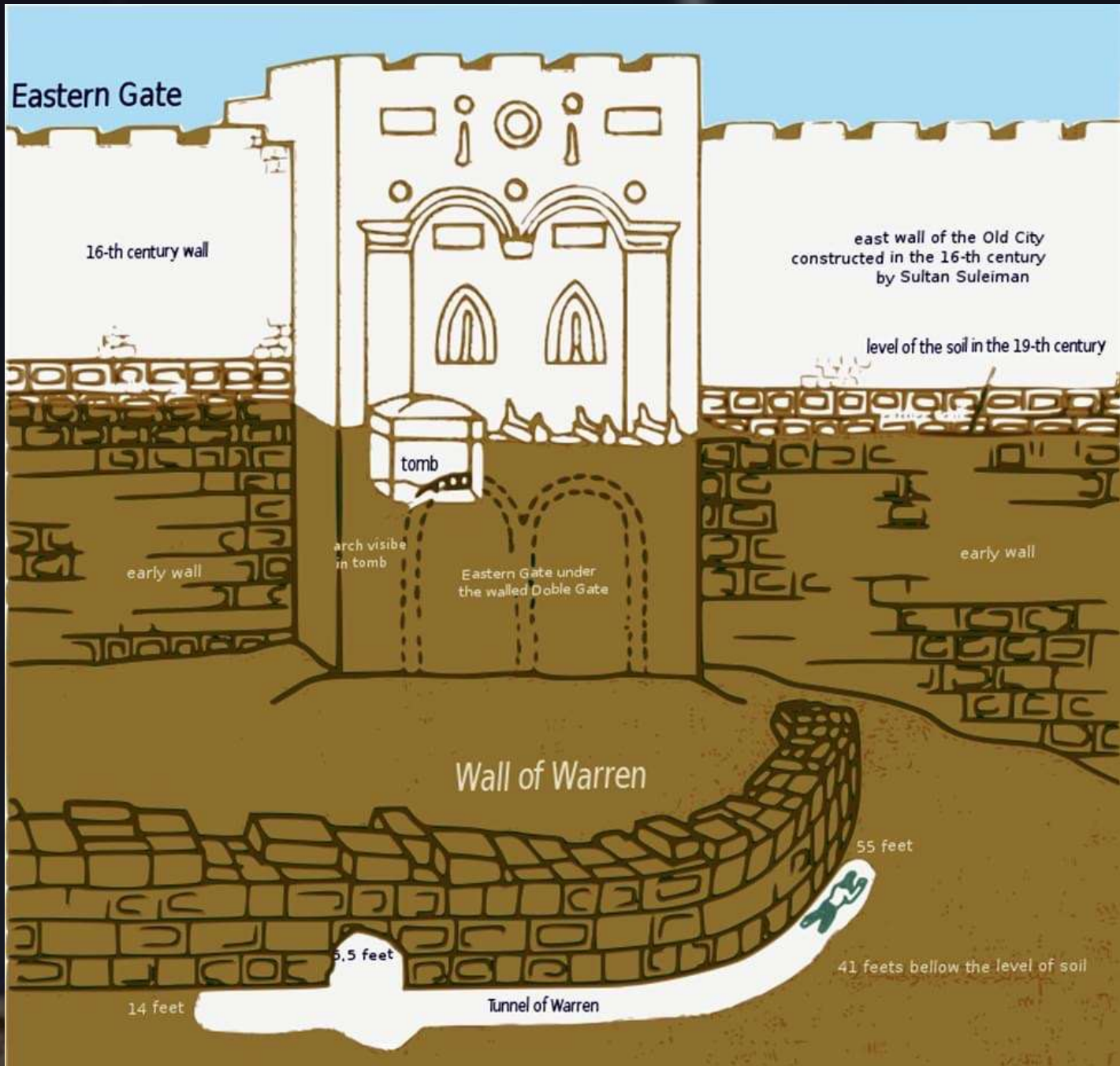


The Temple Institute



Eastern Gate
Mercy Gate
Golden Gate

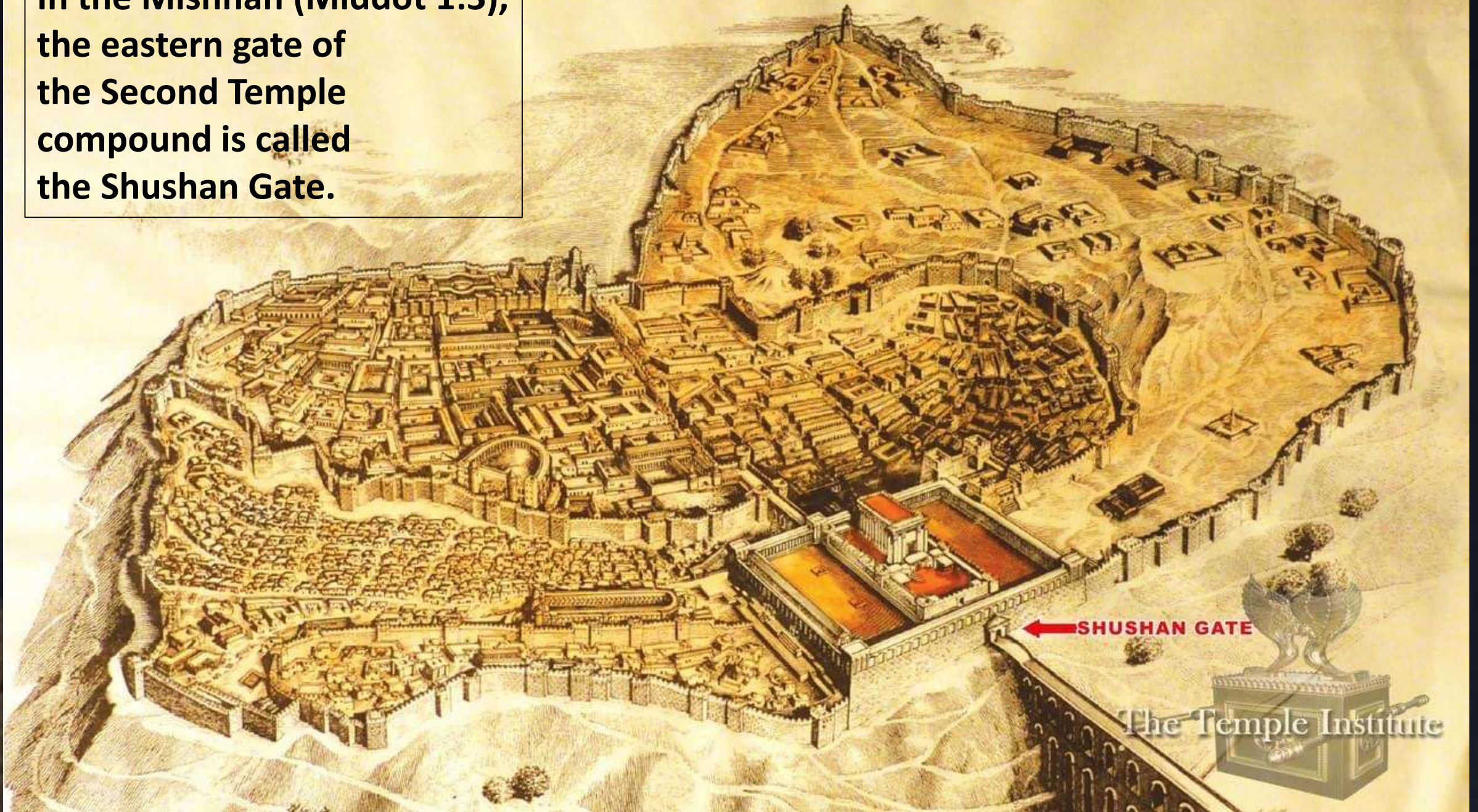




Then He brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces the east; and it was shut. The Lord said to me, “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.” Ezekiel 44:1-2 (written approx. 590 BC)

- The Eastern Gate was ultimately sealed shut in 1541 AD by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman. However, the gate was closed in 810 (also by the Muslims), then reopened in 1102 by the Crusaders, and then walled up again by Saladin (the first sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty) after defeating the Crusaders in 1187 and gaining control of the city of Jerusalem.
- The gate is the point at which the Jewish Messiah will enter the city of Jerusalem, and therefore, in order to prevent this from occurring, the Muslim sultan sealed the gate.

In the Mishnah (Middot 1:3),
the eastern gate of
the Second Temple
compound is called
the Shushan Gate.



In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. Zechariah 14:4

Jesus said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. Acts 1:7-12

- In this series, we are learning about the RETURN of the Jews to the Holy Land from exile in a mission led by Nehemiah.
- As followers of Jesus, we are looking forward to another RETURN, the RETURN of the Savior to gather His followers.
- For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17
- How can we be ready for the Lord's RETURN? The Heavenly Father says today, "RETURN TO ME."

Return to Me

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “**Return to Me** with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.” Now **return to the Lord your God**, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.”

Joel 2:12-13

Do you need to change course today?