

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

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 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

Last week... Problems facing Nehemiah

- A food shortage because crops were not being tended to during the wall construction project (**supply chain problems**)
- Shortage of food supply caused prices to rise (**inflation**)
- Some people had to mortgage their homes and property in order to buy the more expensive food (**increased debt**)
- Some people had to take out high-interest loans in order to pay their taxes (**credit debt**)
- Some people had to sell their children into slavery in order to pay off their debts

I said to them, “We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations [non-Jews]; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?” Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. Again I said, “The thing which you are doing is not good; **should you not walk in the fear of our God** because of the reproach of the nations [non-Jews], our enemies?” Nehemiah 5:8-9

Then they said, “We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.” So I called the priests [as witnesses] and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Nehemiah 5:12

Lessons from Nehemiah's Life for All of Us

- Listen to and obey God's calling on our lives
- Work diligently and effectively in our calling and work
- Be careful and wise stewards of our own resources
 - Get out of debt
 - Stay out of debt
- Notice the needs of others around us
- Use our resources to help others
 - First Melissa has an effective benevolence ministry

Nehemiah Chapter 6

Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that **I had rebuilt the wall**, and that **no breach remained in it**, although at that time **I had not set up the doors in the gates**, Nehemiah 6:1

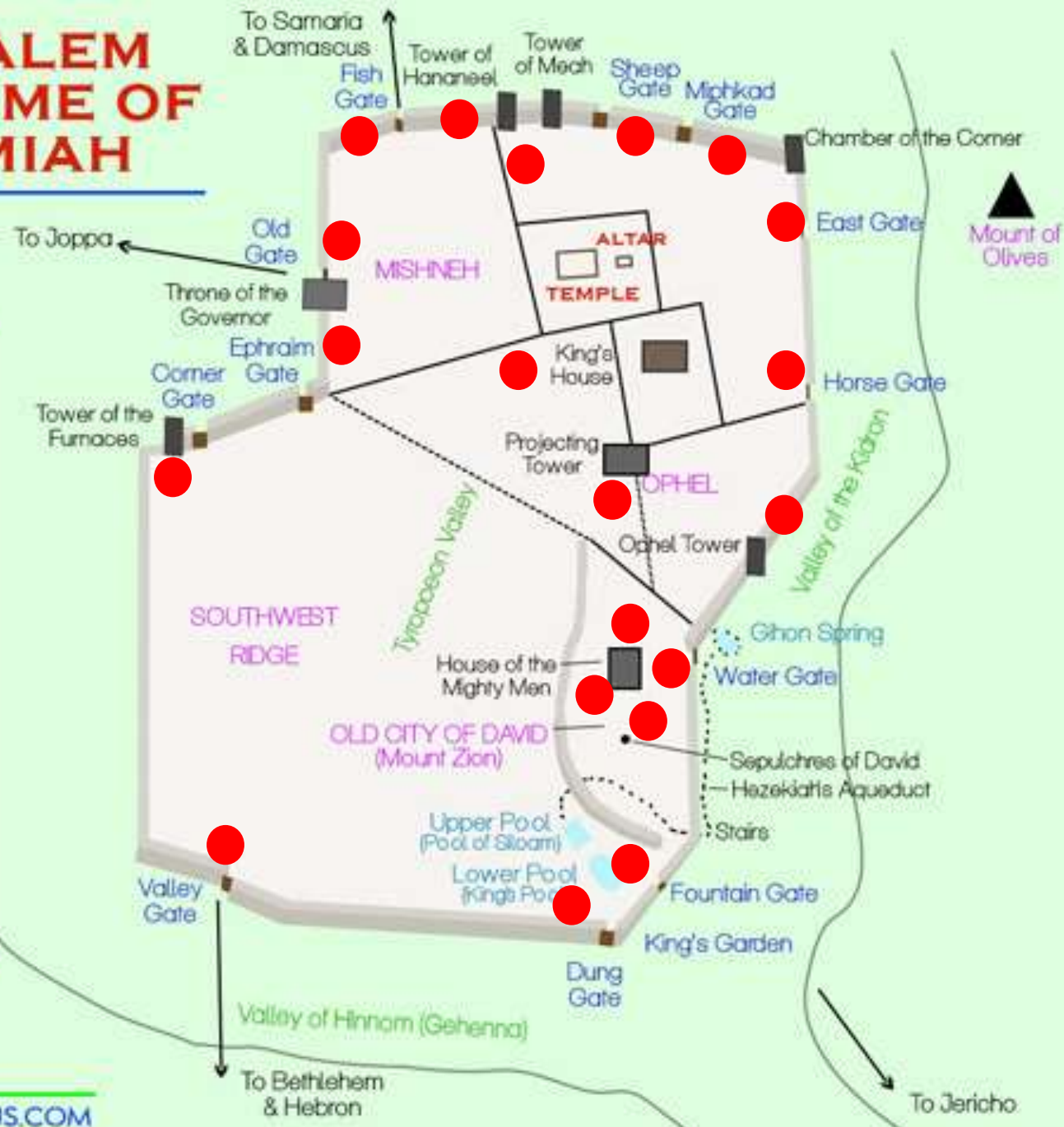
*Nehemiah and the wall construction crew had made great progress despite their opposition, but the project was not complete.

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.

Opponents of the Wall Rebuilding

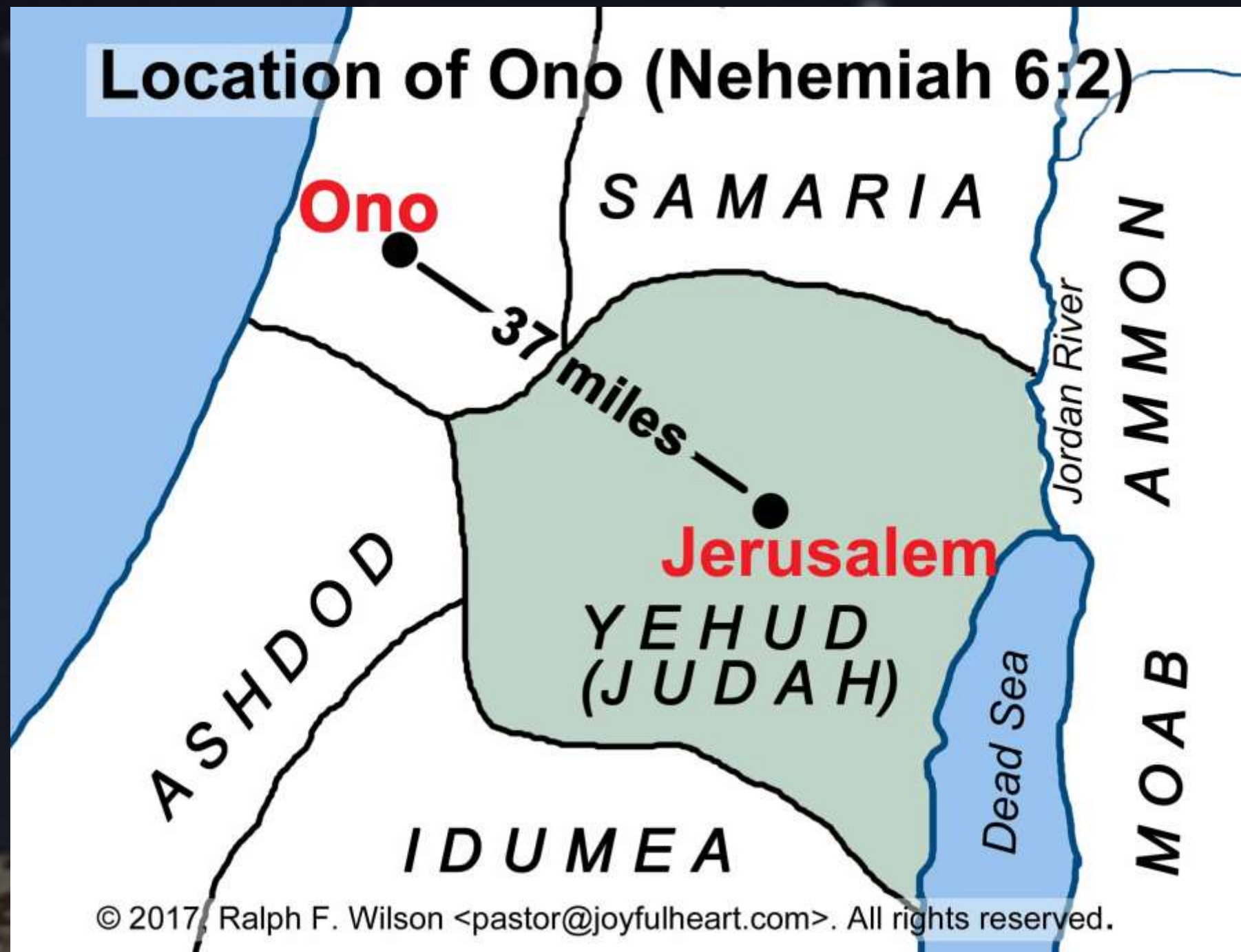
- 1. Sanballat the Horonite** led the Samaritan opposition. According to an Aramaic papyri from Elephantine, he is governor of the Persian province of Syria. Sanballat I is contemporary with Nehemiah, about 444 BC. Later, the son of Jehoiada marries his daughter (Nehemiah 13:28).
- 2. Tobiah the Ammonite** may have had the status of governor over Ammonite territory, east of Judah. A family by his name is prominent in Ammon during the Persian period. Tobiah seems to be of Jewish descent and has close ties to the temple and Jewish nobility. Many influential people are bound to him by oaths (Nehemiah 6:17-19), making him particularly dangerous, since he has a lot to lose from Nehemiah's reforms. He occupies a chamber in the temple precincts during Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:4-9), threatens military raids against Jerusalem while the walls were being built (Nehemiah 4:7-9), and seeks to lure Nehemiah out of the city to assassinate him (Nehemiah 6:1-3).
- 3. Geshem the Arab** seems to be the chief of an Arabian tribe that settled in the area (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:1-2, 6). His name appears on a silver vessel about 40 years after Nehemiah's time. Apparently, Geshem and his son rule a league of Arabian tribes that have taken control of Moab and Edom, to the south and east of Judah.

then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together at Chephirim [villages] in the plain of Ono.” But they were planning to harm me. Nehemiah 6:2

What kind of harm might be done to Nehemiah?

- kidnapping
- assassination

The plain of Ono was named after the town of that name (see 1 Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37; 11:35). Ono was near the border of Samaria, Sanballat's home province.



What was the enemy's next strategy?

- After failing to stop Nehemiah and the construction of the wall around Jerusalem by:
 - Discouragements
 - Mocking
 - Cursing
 - Verbal threats
 - Physical threats
- Now the opponents of Nehemiah “want to talk”

So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” They sent messages to me **four times** in this manner, and I answered them in the same way. Nehemiah 6:3-4

*If we are busy doing the work of God, should we stop it to listen to the anti-God opponents?

*The people of God must stay strong in the face of repeated spiritual opposition.

Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner **a fifth time** with an open [unsealed] letter in his hand. In it was written, “**It is reported** [heard] among the nations, and Gashmu [called Geshem the Arab in other verses] says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, **according to these reports.**” Nehemiah 6:5-6

*People who oppose God question the motives of God's people

- When Nehemiah's enemies realized he would not leave Jerusalem and meet with them, they tried another tactic. They put pressure on him, trying to force him to meet with them in the plain of Ono. Sanballat sent his servant to Nehemiah with an unsealed letter. The letter reported an alleged rumor that Nehemiah was trying to set himself up as the king of the Jews, which in turn would be a threat to Artaxerxes (the king). This letter was insidious in several ways.
- First, the letter made it seem as if they had Nehemiah's welfare at heart. The letter implied that their reason for conferring with him was to protect him.
- Second, and more basic to their motive, they were attempting to get Nehemiah to respond out of fear.
- Third, the letter may have contained an element of truth. Possibly some well-meaning religious leader in Judah had interpreted Nehemiah's presence as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah-King.

“You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, ‘A king is in Judah!’ And now it will be reported to the king **according to these reports**. So come now, let us take counsel together.” Nehemiah 6:7

*Nehemiah’s opponents want to discuss the “rumors.”

*We have a term in today’s politics for “rumors” and “reports.”

*By such accusations in an open letter, which might be read by anyone, Sanballat thought to oblige Nehemiah to come and clear himself from suspicion by an interview. – Commentary on the Old Testament

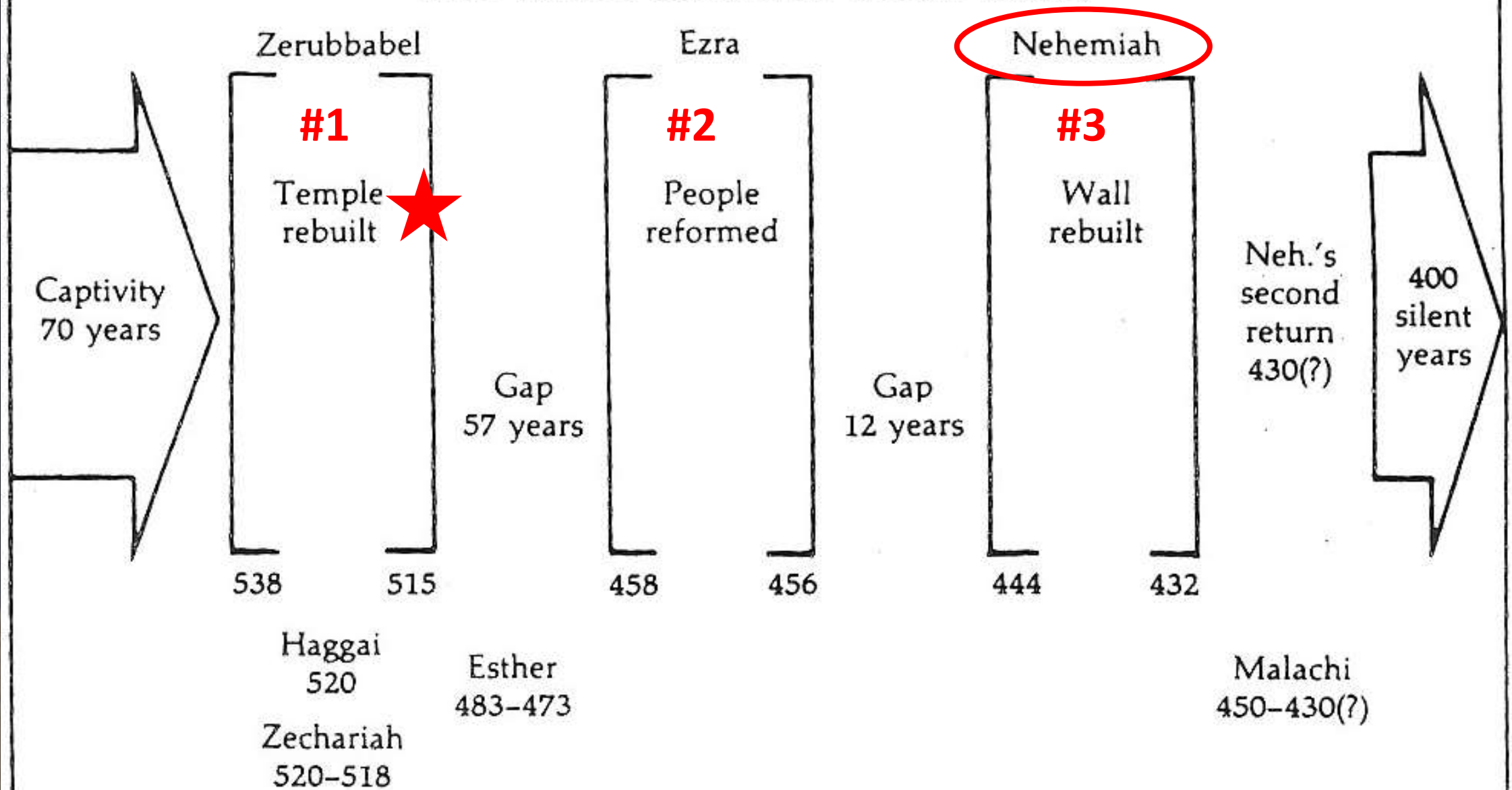
Then I sent a message to him saying, “Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind.” For all of them were trying to frighten us, thinking, “They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done.” [And I prayed...] But now, **O God, strengthen my hands.** Nehemiah 6:8-9

*People of God sometimes have to say to the opponents of God’s work, “that is wrong!” or “that is enough!”

When I entered the house of Shemaiah [a false prophet hired by Nehemiah's enemies] the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home [because of ritual defilement?], he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night." Nehemiah 6:10

*A new obstacle for Nehemiah... someone offering to protect him from [fictional?] attackers

The Three Returns from Exile



But I said, “Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? **I will not go in.**” Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered his prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Nehemiah 6:11-12

*Nehemiah refused to do what he knew was wrong

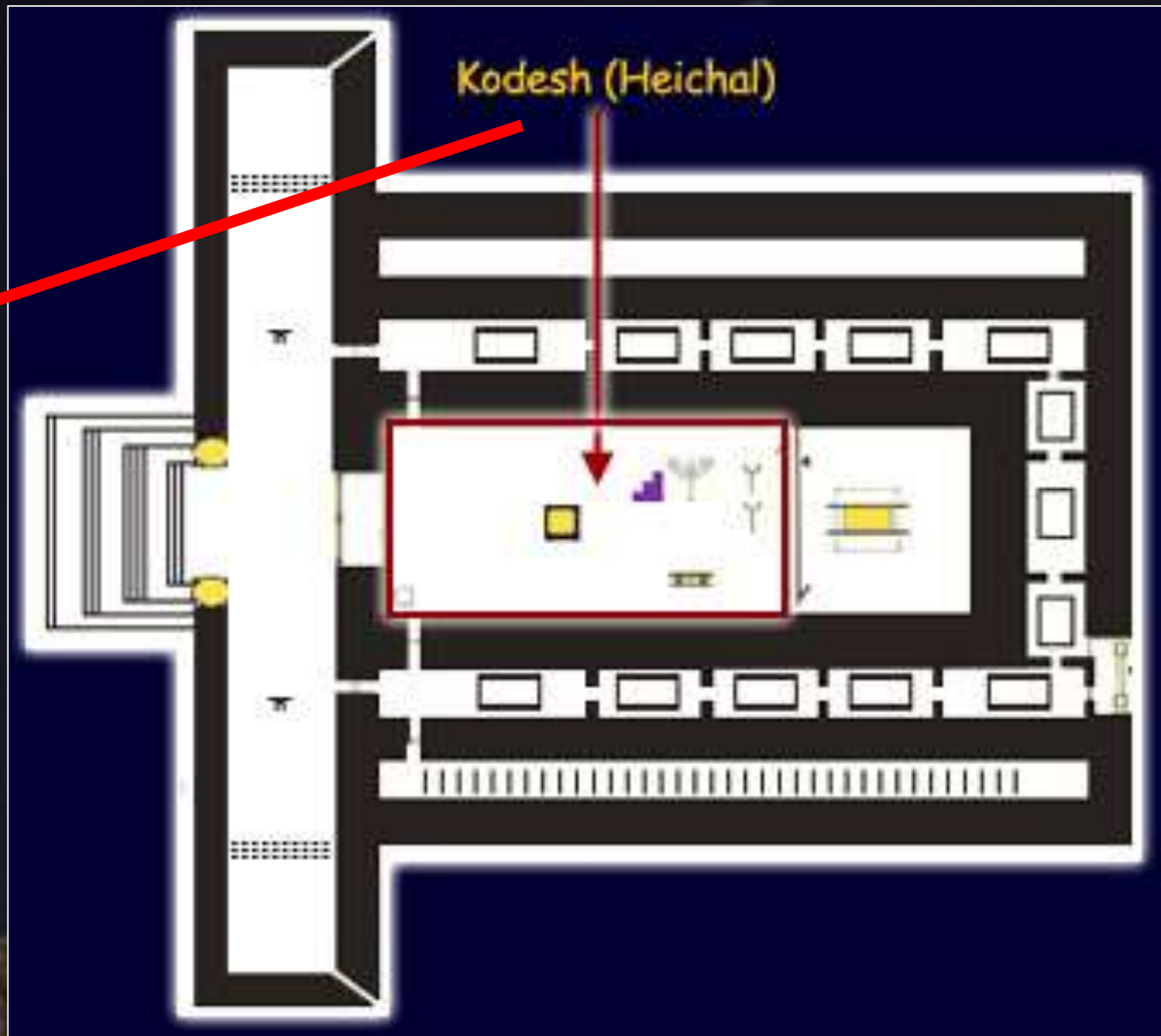
He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and **sin**, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me. Nehemiah 6:13

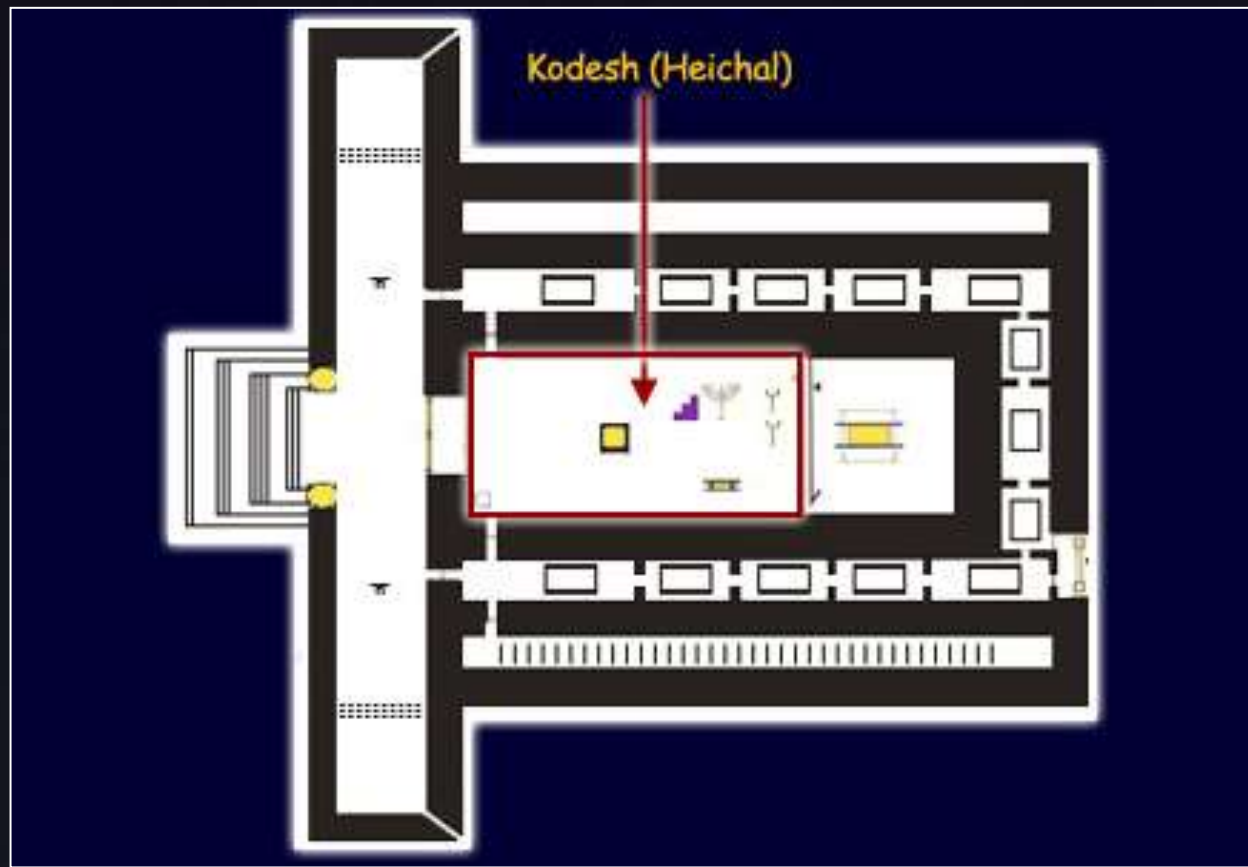
*To enter and to shut himself within the holy place would have been a grave desecration of the house of God, which would have given occasion to his enemies to cast suspicion upon Nehemiah as a despiser of God's commands, and so to undermine his authority with the people. – Commentary on the Old Testament

Model of Temple in Days of Jesus



Model of Temple Mount in the days of Jesus





The Mikdash is built of three parts: The Ulam (Hall); the Kodesh (the Holy area) also known as the Heichal, and the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies. Together they are all called the **Heichal**. In the Heichal were found: the **Menorah** in the south, the **Table of the Showbread** in the north and between them, in the center of the Heichal, the **Incense Altar**. The **Ark of the Covenant** was situated in the Holy of Holies.

Only Jewish priests were allowed in the Holy Place

- “So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death.”
Numbers 3:10
- “But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”
Numbers 18:7
- Nehemiah would not disobey God to try to gain safety from his enemies. If the governor had entered the temple and lived, his people would know he disregarded God’s commands. – Bible Knowledge Commentary

[Nehemiah prayed...] Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me. Nehemiah 6:14

*Whose voices are we listening to today?

*God's people need to be aware of the activities of false prophets and refuse to follow them.

What might happen if we were able
to learn God's mission for our lives,
obey His call, inspire others, work
hard, overcome obstacles and
ignore the doubters?

So **the wall was completed** on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. Nehemiah 6:15

TIMELINE

- *Now it happened in the month **Chislev** [**late November – early December**], in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol, that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came ... Nehemiah 1:1a
- *And it came about in the month **Nisan** [**March/April**], in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him... Nehemiah 2:1a
- *Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem took 2-3 months (**April or May to June or July**)
- *Construction work must have begun on 3rd day of **Av** [**late July**]
- *Wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month **Elul** [**late September**], 10 months after Nehemiah learned of the problem & after 2 months of work

How did they build the wall so fast?

- The necessity for hastening the work repeatedly pointed out by Nehemiah
- The zeal and large number of builders—the whole community, both the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, etc. having combined their efforts
- The kind of exertion demanded by such laborious work and unintermitted watchfulness as are described Nehemiah chapter 4, though it might be continued for fifty-two days, could scarcely endure during a longer period
- The amount of the work itself, which must not be regarded as the rebuilding of the whole wall, but only as the restoration of those portions that had been destroyed, the repair of the breaches (Neh. 1:3, 2:13, 6:1), and of the ruined gates,—a large portion of wall and at least one gate having remained uninjured)
- The material, so far as stone was concerned, was close at hand, stone needing for the most part to be merely brought out of the ruins; besides which, materials of all kind might have been collected and prepared beforehand.

Rebuilding the Wall despite the Opposition

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with **the help of our God**. Nehemiah 6:16

*Our obedience to the Lord's work will be noticed by others

*Our obedience to the Lord's work might just silence the doubters

A Summary of Opposition Tactics Against Nehemiah

- 1.False accusations (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:5-9)
- 2.Ridicule (Nehemiah 4:1-3)
- 3.Devious attempts to be included in the project to subvert it from within (Ezra 4:1-3; Nehemiah 2:20)
- 4.Appeal to higher authorities to stop the project (Ezra 4:5)
- 5.Bluffs
- 6.Rumors to instill fear (Ezra 4:4; Nehemiah 4:11-12)
- 7.Temptations to sin in order to undermine moral authority (Nehemiah 6:10-11)
- 8.False prophecies or supposed "words from God" (Nehemiah 6:12-14)
- 9.Threats and plots to physically incapacitate Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:7-8; 6:1-4)
- 10.Plots to distract his attention (Nehemiah 6:3)
- 11.Disloyalty among Nehemiah's own team (Nehemiah 6:17-19)

Also in those days many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For **many in Judah were bound by oath to him** because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah [one of the wall construction workers – see Nehemiah 3:4 and 3:30].

Nehemiah 6:17-18

Moreover, they [nobles of Judah] were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. Then Tobiah sent letters **to frighten me**. Nehemiah 6:19

*Nehemiah has thus far resisted all kinds of distractions and obstacles and attacks.

*His enemies, the enemies of God's work, would not stop their efforts to discourage and defeat.

The Wall is Complete

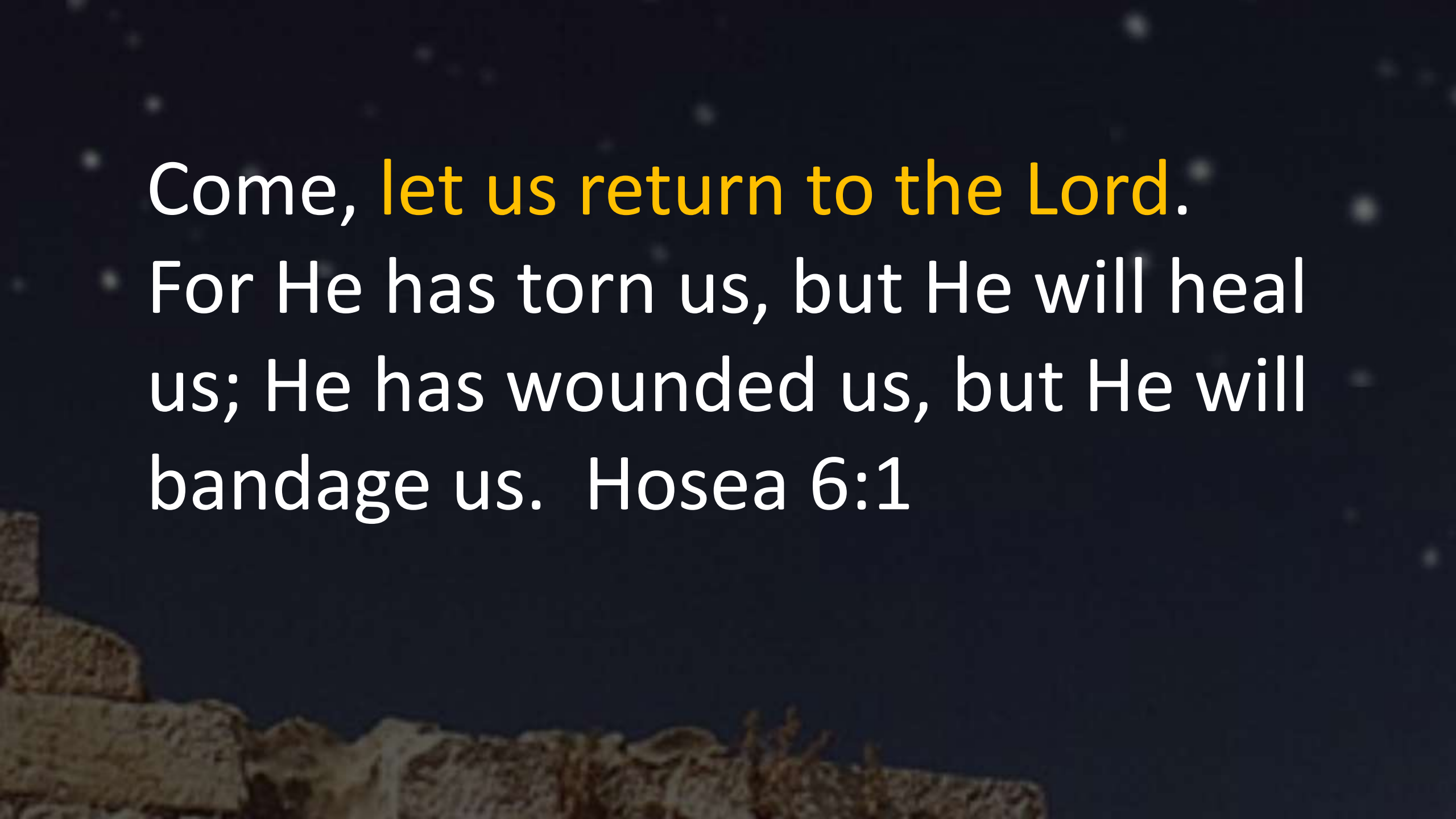
Nehemiah has a lot of work left to do

There is no pause for self-congratulation here, however. The wall is regarded as no more than an institutional framework; what counts are the attitudes and activities of the people who live behind it, and already the close of the chapter indicates dangers in this regard. The narrative thus points us forward to the need for the reforms which are to follow.

Nehemiah

Return to Me

Teaching Series by Pastor Trey Graham



Come, let us return to the Lord.

For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. Hosea 6:1

So the wall was completed on the
twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in
fifty-two days. Nehemiah 6:15

What could God do in our lives
in just 52 days?

52 days from today is Wednesday,
October 12, 2022.

What will you ask God to help you
achieve or overcome in the next 52 days?