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Barnes' Notes on the Bible
Volume 3 -
Nehemiah

By A. Fuller

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NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

In the earliest form of the Hebrew canon known to us the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were united in one, under the name of “The Book of Ezra.” After a while, a division was made, and the two books which we now recognize were distinguished as “the First Book of Ezra” and “the Second Book of Ezra” (By Origen about 230 A.D.). Later still — probably not until toward the close of the fourth century — the Second Book of Ezra came to be known as “the Book of Nehemiah.” (By Jerome.)

The Book of Nehemiah is composed of four quite distinct sections:

- (1) Nehemiah 1—7 containing the record of the 20th year of Artaxerxes (or 445-444 B.C.), but composed by Nehemiah at least twelve years later (^{<1654>}Nehemiah 5:14).
- (2) The second section of the work consists of Nehemiah 8—10, and contains a narrative of some events belonging to the autumn of 444 B.C. In this portion Nehemiah is spoken of in the third person; he is called the Tirshatha,” whereas in the earlier chapters his title is always *pechah* ^{<16346>} (“governor”); and Ezra holds the first and most prominent position. The style of this portion of the book is markedly different from that of the earlier and later chapters; and critics are generally agreed that it is NOT from the hand of Nehemiah. Some assign it to Ezra; others conjecture Zadok (or Zidkijah), Nehemiah’s scribe or secretary (^{<16313>}Nehemiah 13:13), to have been the author.

(Nehemiah’s parenthetical prayers are wholly missing in this section. His favorite term for the “nobles” (*khorim*) ^{<12715>} does not occur. The characteristic phrases, “God of heaven,” and “the good hand of God,” are absent. God is called Jehovah or Jehovah Elohim, almost as often as simply Elohim, whereas Nehemiah uses Jehovah and Jehovah Elohim,” only once, each of them (^{<1606>}Nehemiah 1:5; 5:13). Express mention of the Law of Moses, rare with Nehemiah (only ^{<1630>}Nehemiah 13:1), is constant in this section.)

(3) Nehemiah 11—12:26, which consists of six important lists.

List 1 (^{<1610>}Nehemiah 11:1-24) and List 2 (^{<1612>}Nehemiah 11:25-36) are probably either the work of Nehemiah himself or documents drawn up by his orders.

Of the other lists (^{<1611>}Nehemiah 12:1-26) some may have been drawn up in the time (or even by the hand) of Nehemiah, and incorporated by him into his work as documents having an intrinsic value, though not connected very closely with the subject matter of his history. But the list in ^{<1620>}Nehemiah 12:10,11 cannot, in its present shape, have proceeded from his hand, or from that of a contemporary, since it mentions Jaddua, who lived about a century LATER THAN Nehemiah.

(Jaddua's high priesthood is placed by some between 366 and 336 B.C.; but Josephus brings his date down to 333 B.C., since he makes him meet Alexander AFTER Issus.)

Neither can ^{<1622>}Nehemiah 12:22,23 intruded between the 5th and 6th lists — lists closely interconnected — belong to Nehemiah's time, since they contain a mention of both Jaddua and Darius Codomannus, his contemporary.

(This is the usual identification of "Darius the Persian" (^{<1622>}Nehemiah 12:22, see the note). The expression, "the Persian" is probably an indication that the passage was written after the Greek rule had set in, or later than 331 B.C.)

Possibly, the list in question and the intruded verses may have proceeded from the same hand.

The section may therefore be regarded as the compilation of Nehemiah himself, with the exception of ^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:11,22,23, which must have been added a century later. Or, it was first added at that period. In either case, the writer must be equally considered to have drawn the lists from contemporary state archives (see ^{<1623>}Nehemiah 12:23).

(4) ^{<1627>}Nehemiah 12:27 to the end. This section contains an account of the dedication of the wall, and of certain reforms which Nehemiah effected after his return from Babylon in 432-431 B.C.. It is allowed on all hands to be, in the main, the work of Nehemiah, and written soon after the events — probably in 431 B.C. or 430 B.C.

(It possesses such characteristics of his style and manner as the designation of God exclusively by the name of Elohim, the use of parenthetical prayers (^{<1634>}Nehemiah 13:14,22,29,31), the exact knowledge of localities (^{<1623>}Nehemiah 12:31-39), etc.)

It is perhaps, on the whole, more probable that the various sections composing the “Book of Nehemiah” were collected by Nehemiah himself, who had written, at any rate, two of them (Nehemiah 1—7:5; 12:27; 13:31). Having composed these two separate memoirs, and having perhaps drawn up also certain lists, he adopted from without an account of some religious transactions belonging to his first period, and, inserting this in its proper place, prefixed to the whole work the title, “The words of Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah,” as fitly designating its main contents. His work, thus formed, was subsequently added to by Jaddua, or a writer of that time, who inserted into it ^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:11,22,23. Or, possibly, this late writer may first have formed the book into a whole. The date of the compilation would, in the former case, be about 430 B.C.; in the latter, about one century later.

The authenticity of the history contained in the Book of Nehemiah is generally admitted: and the condition of the text is generally good.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 1

<BOOK>Nehemiah 1:1. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah* The prophetic books commence generally with a title of this kind (see **<BOOK>Jeremiah 1:1**); but no other extant historical book begins thus. Nehemiah, while attaching his work to Ezra, perhaps marked in this manner the point at which his own composition commenced. (See the introduction of the Book of Nehemiah.)

Chisleu The ninth month, corresponding to the end of November and beginning of December.

In the twentieth year i.e. of Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-425 B.C.). Compare **<BOOK>Nehemiah 2:1**.

Shushan the palace Compare **<BOOK>Esther 1:2,5**, etc.; **<BOOK>Daniel 8:2**. Shushan, or Susa, was the ordinary residence of the Persian kings. "The palace" or acropolis was a distinct quarter of the city, occupying an artificial eminence.

<BOOK>Nehemiah 1:2. Hanani seems to have been an actual brother of Nehemiah (**<BOOK>Nehemiah 7:2**).

<BOOK>Nehemiah 1:3. The attempt to rebuild the wall in the time of the Pseudo-Smerdis (**<BOOK>Ezra 4:12-24**) had been stopped. It still remained in ruins. The Assyrian sculptures show that it was the usual practice to burn the gates.

<BOOK>Nehemiah 1:4. *The God of heaven* This title of the Almighty, which is Persian rather than Jewish (see **<BOOK>2 Chronicles 36:23**; **<BOOK>Ezra 1:2** note; 6:10; 7:12,21), is a favorite one with Nehemiah, who had been born and brought up in Persia.

<BOOK>Nehemiah 1:11. A Persian king had numerous cup-bearers, each of whom probably discharged the office in his turn.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 2

<400> **Nehemiah 2:1.** Nisan was the name given by the Persian Jews to the month previously called “Abib,” the first month of the Jewish year, or that which followed the vernal equinox. It fell four months after Chisleu (<400> Nehemiah 1:1).

The twentieth year As Artaxerxes ascended the throne in 465 B.C., his 20th year would correspond to 445-444 B.C.

<400> **Nehemiah 2:2.** *I was very sore afraid* A Persian subject was expected to be perfectly content so long as he had the happiness of being with his king. A request to quit the court was thus a serious matter.

<400> **Nehemiah 2:3.** *The city ... of my fathers' sepulchres* We may conclude from this that Nehemiah was of the tribe of Judah, as Eusebius and Jerome say that he was.

<400> **Nehemiah 2:4.** *I prayed to the God of heaven* Mentally and momentarily, before answering the king.

<400> **Nehemiah 2:6.** *The queen* Though the Persian kings practiced polygamy, they always had one chief wife, who alone was recognized as “queen.” The chief wife of Longimanus was Damaspia.

I set him a time Nehemiah appears to have stayed at Jerusalem twelve years from his first arrival (<400> Nehemiah 5:14); but he can scarcely have mentioned so long a term to the king. Probably his leave of absence was prolonged from time to time.

<400> **Nehemiah 2:8.** *The king's forest* Rather, park. The word used (*pardes*) <46508>; compare *παράδεισος* <3857>, found only here, in <200> Ecclesiastes 2:5, and in Cant. 4:13), is of Persian, or at any rate of Aryan origin. The Persians signified by *pariyadeza* a walled enclosure, ornamented with trees, either planted or of natural growth, and containing numerous wild animals. The “paradise” here mentioned must have been in the neighborhood of Jerusalem, and may have corresponded to the earlier “gardens of Solomon.”

The palace Rather, “the fortress.” The word in the original has the double meaning of “palace” and “fortress,” the fact being that in ancient times palaces were always fortified. “The fortress which pertained to the house (temple)” is first spoken of here. Under the Romans it was called “Antonia.”

Nehemiah 2:10. The name Sanballat is probably Babylonian the first element being the same which commences “Sennacherib,” namely, “Sin,” the moon-God, and the second balatu, “eminent”(?), which is found in the Assyrian name, Bel-balatu. As a Horonite, he was probably a native of one of the Bethhorons, the upper or the lower (see ^{<1618>}Joshua 16:3,5; ^{<1485>}2 Chronicles 8:5), and therefore born within the limits of the old kingdom of Samaria. Tobiah seems to have been an Ammonite slave, high in the favor of Sanballat, whom he probably served as secretary (^{<1617>}Nehemiah 6:17-19) and chief adviser.

It grieved them Compare ^{<1504>}Ezra 4:4-24; 5:6-17. The revival of Jerusalem as a great and strong city, which was Nehemiah’s aim, was likely to interfere with the prosperity, or at any rate the eminence, of Samaria.

Nehemiah 2:13. *The gate of the valley* A gate opening on the valley of Hinnom, which skirted Jerusalem to the west and south. The exact position is uncertain; as is also that of “the dragon well.”

The dung port The gate by which offal and excrements were conveyed out of the city, and placed eastward of the valley-gate.

Nehemiah 2:14. *The gate of the fountain* A gate on the eastern side of the Tyropoeon valley, not far from the pool of Siloam (probably “the king’s pool.” (Compare ^{<1615>}Nehemiah 3:15).

Nehemiah 2:15. *The brook* The Kidron watercourse, which skirted the city on the east.

Turned back i.e. he turned westward, and having made the circuit of the city, re-entered by the valley-gate.

Nehemiah 2:16. *The rulers* The principal authorities of the city, in the absence of the special governor.

The rest that did the work i.e. “the laboring class that (afterward) actually built the wall.”

<K128> **Nehemiah 2:18.** *The king's words* These have not been given; but the royal permission to restore the walls is implied in <K125> Nehemiah 2:5,6.

<K129> **Nehemiah 2:19.** *Geshem the Arabian* The discovery that Sargon populated Samaria in part with an Arab colony explains why Arabs should have opposed the fortification of Jerusalem.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 3

<KRB>Nehemiah 3:1. Eliashib (compare the marginal reference) was the grandson of Joshua, the high priest contemporary with Zerubbabel.

The sheep gate This was a gate in the eastern wall, not far from the pool of Bethesda, marginal reference, which was perhaps originally a sheep-pool.

The exact line which the writer follows in describing the circuit of the wall will probably be always a matter of dispute. According to the view here taken, the line described commences near the pool of Bethesda, on the east of the city, and is traced thence, first, northward, then westward, then southward, and finally eastward, as far as the pool of Siloam (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:15**). From this point, it seems to the writer of this note that the line of the outer wall is not followed, but, instead of this, the inner wall of the “city of David,” which included the temple, is traced. This wall is followed northward from the pool of Siloam, past the “sepulchres of David” and Hezekiah’s pool to the “armoury” (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:19**) at its northwest corner; it is then followed eastward to “the tower which lieth out from the king’s house” (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:25**); from this it is carried southward, along the western edge of the Kidron valley to the “great tower which lieth out” (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:27**), and then southwestward to the point at which it commenced near Siloam (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:27**). The special wall of the “city of David” being thus completed, the writer finishes his entire account by filling up the small interval between the northeast angle of this fortification and the “sheep-gate” (**<KRB>Nehemiah 3:28-32**), from which he started.

They sanctified it The priests commenced the work with a formal ceremony of consecration. When the work was completed, there was a solemn dedication of the entire circuit (see **<KRB>Nehemiah 12:27-43**).

The tower of Hananeel is often mentioned; that of Meah, or rather Hammeah, or “the Hundred,” in Nehemiah only. Both towers must have been situated toward the northeastern corner of the city.

<KRB>Nehemiah 3:2. The people of each provincial town were set to work for the most part on the portion of the wall nearest their city. Thus, “the men of Jericho,” were employed at the northeast corner of Jerusalem.

<48B>Nehemiah 3:3. *The fish gate* The gate through which fish from the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee entered Jerusalem; a gate in the north wall, a little to the east of the modern Damascus gate.

Locks The word used (here and in **<48B>Nehemiah 3:6,13-15**) is thought to mean rather a “cross-bar” than a lock, while that translated “bars” is regarded as denoting the “hooks” or “catches” which held the cross-bar at its two ends.

<48B>Nehemiah 3:5. *Tekoites* See **<104E>2 Samuel 14:2** note.

<48B>Nehemiah 3:6. *The old gate* Either the modern Damascus gate, the main entrance to the city on the north side; or a gate a little further eastward.

<48B>Nehemiah 3:7. *Unto the throne ...* The meaning is thought to be “the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, who, though they worked for Nehemiah, were not under his government, but belonged to the jurisdiction of the governor on this side the river.”

<48B>Nehemiah 3:11. *The other piece* Rather, “another piece” (as in **<48B>Nehemiah 3:19,21,27,30**). It is conjectured that a verse has fallen out in which Malchijah’s and Hashub’s “first piece” was mentioned.

The tower of the furnaces Either a tower at the northwestern angle of the city; or, midway in the western wall. The origin of the name is uncertain.

<48B>Nehemiah 3:13. Zanoah lay west of Jerusalem, at the distance of about 10 miles (**<48B>Joshua 15:34** note).

<48B>Nehemiah 3:15. The “pool of Siloah” lies at the southwestern foot of the temple hill, near the lower end of the Tyropoeon. It appears to have been at all times beyond the line of the city wall, but was perhaps joined to the city by a fortification of its own.

The king’s gardens See **<127D>2 Kings 25:4** note.

The stairs A flight of steps, still to be seen, led from the low valley of the Tyropoeon up the steep sides of Ophel to the “city of David,” which it reached probably at a point not far south of the temple.

Nehemiah 3:16. *Beth-zur* Now Beit-sur, on the road from Jerusalem to Hebron (^{<4158>}Joshua 15:58).

By “the sepulchres of David” must be understood the burial place in which David and the kings his descendants to the time of Hezekiah were interred. This was an excavation in the rock, in the near vicinity of the temple (^{<2647>}Ezekiel 43:7-9), and on its western side. The position of the burial-place was well known until the destruction of the city by Titus; but modern research has not yet discovered it.

The pool Probably that made by Hezekiah in the Tyropoeon valley, west of the temple area (marginal reference).

Nehemiah 3:17-30. The constant mention of “priests,” “Levites,” and Nethinims,” sufficiently indicates that the writer is here concerned with the sacerdotal quarter, that immediately about the temple.

Nehemiah 3:18. *Bavai* Or, “Binnui” (^{<4184>}Nehemiah 3:24; 10:9).

The armoury at the turning of the wall literally, “the armoury of the corner.” The northwestern corner of the special wall of the “city of David” seems to be intended. See ^{<4181>}Nehemiah 3:1 note.

Nehemiah 3:20. *The other piece* Rather, “another piece.” The notice of Baruch’s first piece, like that of Malchijah’s and Hashub’s (^{<4181>}Nehemiah 3:11), seems to have slipped out of the text.

Nehemiah 3:22. The word here translated “plain” is applied in the rest of Scripture almost exclusively to the Ghor or Jordan valley. Compare, however, ^{<4128>}Nehemiah 12:28.

Nehemiah 3:24. *The turning of the wall* The northeastern angle of the “city of David” seems here to be reached. At this point a tower “lay out” (^{<4125>}Nehemiah 3:25), or projected extraordinarily, from the wall, being probably a watch-tower commanding the Kidron valley and all the approaches to the city from the southeast, the east, and the northeast.

Nehemiah 3:25. The “king’s high house” is almost certainly the old palace of David, which was on the temple hill, and probably occupied a position directly north of the temple.

That was by the court of the prison Prisons were in old times adjuncts of palaces. The palace of David must have had its prison; and the “prison gate” (^{<4623>}Nehemiah 12:39) was clearly in this quarter.

^{<4625>}**Nehemiah 3:26.** The marginal reading is better. On the Nethinims see ^{<1302>}1 Chronicles 9:2 note.

Ophel was the slope south of the temple (see the marginal reference “y” note); and the water-gate, a gate in the eastern wall, either for the escape of the superfluous water from the temple reservoirs, or for the introduction of water from the Kidron valley when the reservoirs were low.

^{<4627>}**Nehemiah 3:27.** The foundations of an outlying tower near the southeast angle of the temple area in this position have been recently discovered.

^{<4628>}**Nehemiah 3:28.** “The horse gate” was on the east side of the city, overlooking the Kidron valley. It seems to have been a gate by which horses approached and left the old palace, that of David, which lay north of the temple (^{<4625>}Nehemiah 3:25).

^{<4628>}**Nehemiah 3:31.** *The gate Miphkad* Not elsewhere mentioned. It must have been in the east, or northeast, wall, a little to the south of the “sheep-gate”

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 4

<K01> **Nehemiah 4:4.** The parenthetical prayers of Nehemiah form one of the most striking characteristics of his history. Here we have the first. Other examples are <K05> Nehemiah 5:19; 6:9,14; 13:14,22,29,31.

<K06> **Nehemiah 4:6.** *Unto the half thereof* i.e. to half the intended height.

<K07> **Nehemiah 4:7.** *The Arabians ...* Probably a band, composed largely of Arabians, Ammonites, and Ashdodites, which Sanballat maintained as a guard to his person, and which formed a portion of “the army of Samaria” (<K02> Nehemiah 4:2). A quarrel between such a band and the people of Jerusalem might be overlooked by the Persian king.

<K09> **Nehemiah 4:9.** *Because of them* Or, “over against them,” i.e. opposite to the place where they were encamped, probably on the north side of the city.

<K02> **Nehemiah 4:12.** *Ten times* i.e. repeatedly.

From all places ... Better as in the margin. The Jews who dwelt on the Samaritan border, came to Jerusalem and tried to withdraw their contingents of workmen from the work, representing to them the impending danger, and saying, “You must return to your homes, and so escape it.”

<K03> **Nehemiah 4:13.** *The lower places* The places where those within the walls had the least advantage of elevation, the naturally weak places, where an enemy was likely to make his attack.

<K06> **Nehemiah 4:16.** *Habergeons* Or, “coats of mail.” Coats of mail were common in Assyria from the ninth century B.C., and in Egypt even earlier. They were made of thin laminae of bronze or iron, sewn upon leather or linen, and overlapping one another.

<K02> **Nehemiah 4:22.** *Let every one ... lodge within Jerusalem* i.e. Let none return to his own village or city at night, but let all take their rest in Jerusalem.”

~~<K&E23>~~ **Nehemiah 4:23.** *Saving ...* The text here is probably unsound. It yields no satisfactory sense. See the margin.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 5

Nehemiah 5:2. *Are many* A slight emendation brings this verse into exact parallelism with the next, and gives the sense — “We have pledged our sons and our daughters, that we might get corn, and eat and live.” Compare **Nehemiah 5:5**.

Nehemiah 5:4. *The king’s tribute* The tax payable to the Persian monarch (compare **Ezra 4:13**; **Esther 10:1**). In ancient times, heavy taxation was often productive of debt and distress.

Nehemiah 5:5. The power of a father to sell his daughter into slavery is expressly mentioned in the Law (**Exodus 21:7**). The power to sell a son appears from this passage. In either case, the sale held good for only six years, or until the next year of jubilee (see the marginal references).

Nehemiah 5:7. *Ye exact usury* The phrase is unique to Nehemiah, and is best explained by the context, which shows the practice of the rich Jews at the time to have been not so much to lend on usury as to lend on mortgage and pledge.

Nehemiah 5:8. Nehemiah contrasts his own example with that of the rich Jews. He had spent money in redeeming some countrymen in servitude among the pagan; they were causing others to be sold into slavery among the Jews.

Nehemiah 5:10. *I ... might exact* Nehemiah had lent, but not upon pledge.

Nehemiah 5:11. *The hundredth part of the money ...* i.e. the interest. It is conjectured that the 100th part was payable monthly, or, in other words, that interest was taken at the rate of twelve per cent. The Law altogether disallowed the taking of interest from Israelites (see **Exodus 22:25**; **Leviticus 25:36**, etc.).

Nehemiah 5:13. *I shook my lap* Compare the marginal references. By “lap” is meant a fold in the bosom of the dress, capable of serving as a pocket. Compare **Isaiah 49:22** margin.

<K614> **Nehemiah 5:14.** *Have not eaten the bread of the governor* i.e. “have not, like other Persian governors, lived at the expense of the people under my government.” See <E044> Ezra 4:14 note.

<K615> **Nehemiah 5:15.** *Forty shekels of silver* A daily sum from the entire province. For such a table as that kept by Nehemiah (<K618> Nehemiah 5:18), this would be a very moderate payment.

<K616> **Nehemiah 5:16.** *I continued ... land* i.e. — “I took my share in the work of the wall, as general superintendent. I did not take advantage of the general poverty to buy poor men’s plots of ground.”

<K618> **Nehemiah 5:18.** Compare the far grander provision for Solomon’s table (see the marginal reference).

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 6

<401>Nehemiah 6:1. *Upon the gates* Rather, “in the gates.” This work would naturally be delayed until the last phase.

<402>Nehemiah 6:2. The choice made of Ono, on the skirts of Benjamin, 25 or 30 miles from Jerusalem, as the meeting-place, was, no doubt, in order to draw Nehemiah to a distance from his supporters, that so an attack might be made on him with a better chance of success.

<403>Nehemiah 6:5. The letter was “open,” in order that the contents might be generally known, and that the Jews, alarmed at the threats contained in it, might refuse to continue the work.

<404>Nehemiah 6:10. *Who was shut up* On account, probably, of some legal uncleanness. Compare **<2015>Jeremiah 36:5**.

<405>Nehemiah 6:11. *Would go into the temple to save his life* Rather “could go into the temple and live.” For a layman to enter the sanctuary was a capital offence (see **<0487>Numbers 18:7**).

<406>Nehemiah 6:12. The existence of a party among the Jews who sided with Sanballat and lent themselves to his schemes, is here for the first time indicated. Compare **<4064>Nehemiah 6:14,17-19; 13:4,5,28**.

<4074>Nehemiah 6:14. Noadiah is not elsewhere mentioned. The examples of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna, show that the prophetic gift was occasionally bestowed upon women (**<1224>2 Kings 22:14** note).

<4085>Nehemiah 6:15. *Elul* The sixth month, corresponding to the latter part of August and the beginning of September.

In fifty and two days Josephus states that the repairs of the wall occupied two years and four months. But Nehemiah’s narrative is thoroughly consistent with itself, and contains in it nothing that is improbable. The walls everywhere existed at the time that he commenced his task, and only needed repairs. The work was partitioned among at least 37 working parties, who labored simultaneously, with material ready at hand; and, notwithstanding all menaces, uninterruptedly.

~~<1618>~~ **Nehemiah 6:18.** Though Tobiah is called “the servant” or “slave” (~~<1620>~~ Nehemiah 2:10,19), and was perhaps a bought slave of Sanballat’s, yet he was in such a position that Jewish nobles readily contracted affinity with him. This is quite in harmony with the practice of the East, where slaves often fill high positions and make great marriages.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 7

Nehemiah 7:1. Since the watch of the temple had hitherto been kept by porters, singers, and Levites (^{<1301>}1 Chronicles 26:1-19), so now the watch of the entire city was committed to men of the same three classes, their experience pointing them out as the most suitable persons.

Nehemiah 7:2. *My brother Hanani* See ^{<1402>}Nehemiah 1:2.

The ruler of the palace Or, “the governor of the fortress.” See the marginal reference note.

He i.e. Hananiah.

Nehemiah 7:3. *Until the sun be hot* An unusual precaution. The ordinary practice in the East is to open town gates at sunrise.

Nehemiah 7:4. *The people were few* The number of those who returned with Zerubbabel was no more than 42,360 (^{<1406>}Nehemiah 7:66). Less than 2,000 people had come with Ezra (^{<1508>}Ezra 8:1-20).

Nehemiah 7:5. It is argued by some that the entire catalogue which follows (^{<1407>}Nehemiah 7:7-73) is not the register of them “which came up `at the first’,” but of the Jewish people in Nehemiah’s time. ^{<1407>}Nehemiah 7:7 and ^{<1510>}Ezra 2:2 are, however, very positive in their support of the usual view; and some of the arguments against it are thought to be met by considering the Nehemiah of ^{<1407>}Nehemiah 7:7 and ^{<1510>}Ezra 2:2 a person different from Nehemiah the governor; and “Tirshatha” an official title likely to have belonged to others besides Nehemiah (see the ^{<1503>}Ezra 2:63 note.)

Nehemiah 7:70-73. Compared with ^{<1509>}Ezra 2:69 there is considerable difference between the totals for gold, silver, and garments. The usual explanation is that of corruption in the one or the other of the passages.

Nehemiah 7:73. *Dwelt in their cities* Nehemiah’s quotation from Zerubbabel’s register ends here, and the narration of events in Jerusalem in his own day is resumed from ^{<1403>}Nehemiah 7:3. The narrative (Nehemiah 8;

10) appears from internal evidence to be by a different author (see the introduction of the Book of Nehemiah).

The last two clauses of ~~14/73~~ Nehemiah 7:73 should stand as the beginning of Nehemiah 8 (as in the Septuagint). The text would then run: “And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in their cities, the whole people gathered themselves together as one man,” etc. Compare the margin reference.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 8

<480>Nehemiah 8:1. *The street* Rather, “the square” or “court.” So in **<486>Nehemiah 8:16** (compare **<450>Ezra 10:9**). The court seems to have been one between the eastern gate of the temple and the watergate in the city-wall. It would thus lie within the modern Haram area.

Ezra the scribe This is the first mention of Ezra in the present book, and the first proof we have had that he was contemporary with Nehemiah. Probably he returned to the court of Artaxerxes soon after effecting the reforms which he relates in Ezra 10, and did not revisit Jerusalem until about the time when the walls were completed, or after an absence of more than ten years. It was natural for the people to request him to resume the work of exposition of the Law to which he had accustomed them on his former visit (**<4570>Ezra 7:10,25**).

<480>Nehemiah 8:2. *Upon the first day of the seventh month* The day of the “Feast of Trumpets” (see the margin reference note). The gathering together of the people, spoken of in **<480>Nehemiah 8:1**, was probably to observe this feast.

<480>Nehemiah 8:4. The 13 persons mentioned were probably the chief priests of the course (shift) which was at the time performing the temple service.

<480>Nehemiah 8:5. *Stood up* The attitude of attention and respect. Compare the existing practice of the Christian Church at the reading of the Gospel for the day.

<480>Nehemiah 8:7. The names here (and in **<480>Nehemiah 9:4,5**; **<480>Nehemiah 10:9**) seem not to be the personal appellations of individuals, but rather designations of Levitical families, the descendants respectively of Jeshua, etc., who lived not later than the time of Zerubbabel (**<4874>Nehemiah 7:43; 12:8**).

<480>Nehemiah 8:8. *Gave the sense* Either by rendering the Hebrew into the Aramaic dialect, or perhaps simply by explaining obscure words or passages.

Caused them to understand Either “they (the people) understood what was read;” or, “they (the Levites) expounded as they read.”

<4689> **Nehemiah 8:9.** *Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha* Hereto, Nehemiah has called himself *pechah* <46346> (<4654> Nehemiah 5:14,15,18), which is the ordinary word for “governor.” Now for the first time he is called ‘the Tirshatha’“ (see <4505> Ezra 2:63 note.)

The people wept ... Because the Law brought vividly before them their sins of omission and commission. In <4680> Nehemiah 8:10 the Jews were not forbidden to be sorry for their sins, but they were only prohibited from marring a festive occasion with the expression of their sorrow.

<4680> **Nehemiah 8:10.** The “sending of portions” to the poor is not distinctly mentioned in any but the later historical Scriptures (compare the margin reference). The practice naturally grew out of this injunction of the Law (<4561> Deuteronomy 16:11,14).

<4683> **Nehemiah 8:13.** *To understand* Rather, “to consider.”

<4684> **Nehemiah 8:14.** The Feast of tabernacles had fallen into abeyance either entirely, or as regarded the dwelling in booths (<4687> Nehemiah 8:17), since the time when it was kept by Zerubbabel (<4504> Ezra 3:4). It is evident that the observance of the Law, impossible during the captivity, was restored slowly and with difficulty after the return.

<4685> **Nehemiah 8:15.** *The mount* The “mount of Olives” is probably intended.

Pine branches Rather, “branches of the wild olive.” The actual trees named by the Law may have become scarce. It was probably considered that the spirit of the command was kept if branches of trees similar in general character to those named in Leviticus were employed.

<4687> **Nehemiah 8:17.** It is not the intention of the writer to state that the Feast of tabernacles had not been kept from the time of Joshua until this occasion (see <4602> 1 Kings 8:2,65; <4504> Ezra 3:4); but that there had been no such celebration as this since Joshua’s time. Compare <4222> 2 Kings 23:22; <4558> 2 Chronicles 35:18.

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 9

Nehemiah 9:1. The festival lasted from the 15th day of the 7th month to the first. The 22nd day was a day of solemn observance (^{<1088>}Nehemiah 8:18). One day seems to have been allowed the people for rest; and then the work of repentance, for which they had shown themselves ready (^{<1089>}Nehemiah 8:9), was taken in hand, and a general fast was proclaimed.

Nehemiah 9:4. The Septuagint and the Vulgate remove the comma after “stairs.” By the “stairs (or scaffold) of the Levites” is to be understood as an elevated platform from which they could the better address and lead the people (compare ^{<1090>}Nehemiah 8:4).

Nehemiah 9:5. *Stand up* The people had knelt to confess and to worship God (^{<1091>}Nehemiah 9:3). They were now to take the proper attitude for praise. Compare throughout the margin reference.

Nehemiah 9:6. *The host of heaven worshippeth thee* i.e. the angels. See ^{<1129>}1 Kings 22:19; ^{<9432>}Psalms 103:21.

Nehemiah 9:17. *In their rebellion* The Septuagint and several manuscripts have “in Egypt” (the words in the original differing by one letter only), and translate — “And appointed a captain to return to their bondage in Egypt.” Compare the margin reference. The appointment of a leader is regarded here as made, whereas we are only told in the Book of Numbers that it was proposed.

Nehemiah 9:22. *Thou didst divide them into corners* i.e., parts of the holy land; or as some prefer “thou didst distribute them on all sides.”

Nehemiah 9:25. *Became fat.* i.e., “grew proud,” or “wanton” — a phrase only occurring here, in the margin reference, and in ^{<2458>}Jeremiah 5:28.

Delighted themselves Rather, “luxuriated.” The word in the original does not occur elsewhere; but cognate terms make the sense clear.

Nehemiah 9:26. *Slew thy prophets* Compare ^{<11804>}1 Kings 18:4; 19:10; ^{<1201>}2 Chronicles 24:21. Jewish tradition further affirms that more

than one of the great prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) were martyred by their countrymen.

~~<K027>~~ **Nehemiah 9:27.** *Thou gavest them saviours* See ~~<00B5>~~ Judges 3:15 etc.

~~<K038>~~ **Nehemiah 9:38.** *Seal unto it* The exact force of the phrase used is doubtful; but its general sense must be that the classes named took part in the sealing. It was usual in the East to authenticate covenants by appending the seals of those who were parties to them (see ~~<2420>~~ Jeremiah 32:10).

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 10

Nehemiah 10:1. The “Zidkijah” of this passage is probably the same as “Zadok” (^{<61313>}Nehemiah 13:13). “Zadok” is expressly called “the scribe,” and it was probably as the scribe who drew up the document that “Zidkijah” signed it immediately after Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 10:2-8. The names are not personal, but designate families. The seal of the high-priestly house of Seraiah was probably appended either by Ezra or Eliashib, both of whom belonged to it.

Nehemiah 10:31. *Bring ware ... on the sabbath day* Compare ^{<61316>}Nehemiah 13:16, where this desecration of the Sabbath is shown to have commonly taken place.

Leave the seventh year ... i.e., “let the land rest in the sabbatical year” (margin reference) and give up the “pledge-taking” (^{<61012>}Nehemiah 10:2-10).

Nehemiah 10:32. *The third part of a shekel* This appears to have been the first occasion on which an annual payment toward the maintenance of the temple service and fabric was established. The half-shekel of the Law (^{<62013>}Exodus 30:13) was paid only at the time of a census (which rarely took place), and was thus not a recurring tax. In later times, the annual payment was raised from the third of a shekel to half a shekel (^{<61724>}Matthew 17:24).

Nehemiah 10:34. No special provision was made by the Law, by David, or by Solomon, for the supply of wood necessary to keep fire ever burning upon the altar. Nehemiah established a system by which the duty of supplying the wood was laid as a burden in turn on the various clans or families, which were regarded as constituting the nation. The lot was used to determine the order in which the several families should perform the duty. A special day (the 14th of the fifth month, according to Josephus) was appointed for the bringing in of the supply; and this day was after a time regarded as a high festival, and called “the feast of the wood-offering.”

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 11

Nehemiah 11:1. *To bring one of ten* Artificial enlargements of capitals by forcible transfers of population to them, were not unusual in ancient times. About 500 B.C., Syracuse became a great city in this way. Tradition ascribed the greatness of Rome, in part, to this cause.

Nehemiah 11:4-19. See the margin reference notes. Both accounts appear to be extracts from a public official register which Nehemiah caused to be made of his census. The census itself seems to have been confined to the dwellers at Jerusalem. The subjoined table exhibits the differences between the accounts of the entire population of Jerusalem as given in Nehemiah and in Chronicles:

	1 Chronicles	Nehemiah
Tribe of Judah:		
Of Pharez		468
Of Zerah	690	
Tribe of Benjamin:	956	928
Tribe of Levi:		
Priests	1760	1192
Levites		284
Porters	212	172

According to Nehemiah's numbers, supplemented from Chronicles, the entire adult male population of the city was 3,734, which would give a total population of 14,936. According to Chronicles, supplemented from Nehemiah, the adult males were 4,370, and consequently the entire population, would have been 17,480. As the Nethinims and the Israelites of Ephraim and Manasseh (¹1 Chronicles 9:3) are not included in either list, we may conclude that the actual number of the inhabitants, after the efforts recorded in ²Nehemiah 11:1,2, was not much short of 20,000.

Nehemiah 11:16. *The outward business of the house of God* Such as the collection of the newly-imposed tax (³²Nehemiah 10:32), the providing of the regular sacrifices, the renewal of vestments, and the like.

Nehemiah 11:17. *The principal to begin the thanksgiving* i.e., “the precentor,” or “leader of the choir.”

Nehemiah 11:20. The returned community, though consisting mainly of members of the two tribes, represented the entire people of Israel. The ground, however, which they occupied, was not the whole land, but that which had constituted the kingdom of Judah.

Nehemiah 11:21. Ophel, the southern spur of the temple hill, having a wall of its own (**Nehemiah 3:27**) might be reckoned either in Jerusalem or outside it. Here it is made a separate place.

Nehemiah 11:22. The business intended was probably the internal business, as distinct from the “outward business” (**Nehemiah 11:16**): a part of which was the apportionment of the royal bounty among the members of the choir (**Nehemiah 11:23**).

Nehemiah 11:23. The goodwill of Artaxerxes toward the ministers employed in the temple service, had been previously shown by his exempting them from taxation of every kind (**Ezra 7:24**). Now, it would seem, he had gone further and assigned to the singers an allowance from the royal revenue.

Nehemiah 11:24. It is difficult to say what office Pethahiah filled. So far as we know, the only regular officers under the Persian system of government were the satrap, the subsatrap, the permanent royal secretary, the commandant, and the occasional commissary.

Nehemiah 11:25. *Kirjath-arba* i.e., Hebron. In the absence of the Hebrews during the captivity, the place had recovered its old name (**Joshua 15:13**).

Nehemiah 11:26-35. Many of the places mentioned in these verses are mentioned in **Joshua 15:27-39; 18:21-28**.

Nehemiah 11:36. *Of the Levites were divisions* i.e., “the Levites were scattered among various towns both in Judah and Benjamin.”

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 12

This chapter is made up of two portions:

- (a) lists of the leading priests and Levites at different periods (^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:1-26);
- (b) the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (^{<1627>}Nehemiah 12:27-47).

This latter passage is certainly from the pen of Nehemiah, and was written probably about 433 B.C. The lists included in (a) are four:

- (1) the chief priestly and Levitical families which returned to Jerusalem (^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:1-9);
- (2) the succession of the high priests from Jeshua to Jaddua (^{<1620>}Nehemiah 12:10,11);
- (3) the actual heads of the priestly families in the time of the high priest Joiakim (^{<1622>}Nehemiah 12:12-21);
- (4) the chief Levitical families at the same period (^{<1623>}Nehemiah 12:24-26).

Of these lists, List 1, List 3, and List 4, may have been drawn up in the time of Nehemiah, but List 2, in its present form, must be much later. See the introduction of the Book of Nehemiah.

^{<1621>}**Nehemiah 12:1.** *The priests* The number of the names here given, which is 22, is probably to be connected with that of the Davidic “courses,” which was 24 (^{<1347>}1 Chronicles 24:7-18). Eight names are identical with those of the heads in David’s time. On comparing the present list with that of the families who sealed to Nehemiah’s covenant (^{<1619>}Nehemiah 10:2-8), we shall find that the first sixteen recur in that document nearly in the same order; but that the last six are absent from it. It would seem that as these six declined to seal to Nehemiah’s covenant, they were placed below the rest here in a sort of supplementary list. Note especially the “and” which connects the second part of the lists with the earlier part, both in ^{<1621>}Nehemiah 12:6 and in ^{<1629>}Nehemiah 12:19.

<6178> **Nehemiah 12:8.** Of the Levitical houses here mentioned, three only returned at first, those of Jeshua, Kadmiel, and Judah or Hodevah (<6178> Nehemiah 7:43). The others must have returned subsequently.

<6120> **Nehemiah 12:10,11.** The six generations of high priests covered a little more than two centuries (538-333 B.C.), or a little under thirty-five years to a generation. Jaddua was the high priest who (according to Josephus) had an interview with Alexander shortly after the battle of Issus.

<6122> **Nehemiah 12:22,23.** These verses interrupt the account of the church officers in the time of Joiakim, resumed in <6124> Nehemiah 12:24. They appear to be an addition to the original text, made about the time of Alexander the Great, when the Books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah would seem to have first taken their existing shape. The same writer who introduced these verses, probably also added <6121> Nehemiah 12:11 to the original text.

Darius the Persian Probably Darius Codomannus (336-331 B.C.), the antagonist of Alexander the Great. See the introduction of the Book of Nehemiah.

This passage shows that the practice of keeping a record of public events in state archives was continued after the return from the captivity, at least to the time of Johanan, the son, i.e., “the grandson,” of Eliasbib.

<6124> **Nehemiah 12:24.** *Jeshua the son of Kadmiel* If the reading be sound, this Jeshua must have been the head of the Levitical family of Kadmiel in the time of Joiakim; but (compare <6107> Nehemiah 8:7; 9:4), some read “Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel,” etc.

Ward over against ward i.e., “alternately,” one part of the choir corresponding the other.

<6125> **Nehemiah 12:25.** In <1397> 1 Chronicles 9:17,24,26, four families of porters only are mentioned; six are implied here, in <6145> Nehemiah 7:45, and in <1102> Ezra 2:42. From <1334> 1 Chronicles 26:14-19 it appears that the temple had four chief gates, fronting the cardinal points, and two minor ones, “toward Asuppim,” and “at Parbar.”

<6127> **Nehemiah 12:27.** *The dedication of the wall* The ceremony had been deferred for the space of nearly 12 years (<6136> Nehemiah 13:6).

Perhaps Nehemiah required an express permission from the Persian king before he could venture on a solemnity which might have been liable to misrepresentation.

Out of all their places i.e., out of the various cities of Judah and Benjamin in which they dwelt (^{<6135>}Nehemiah 11:36).

^{<6128>}**Nehemiah 12:28.** *The plain country round about Jerusalem* Perhaps the valleys of Hinnom and Jehoshaphat, which enclose Jerusalem on three sides, are intended.

The villages of Netophathi Rather, as in ^{<1396>}1 Chronicles 9:16. Netophah lay near Bethlehem (^{<1125>}1 Chronicles 2:54), and is perhaps represented by the modern Antubeh.

^{<6129>}**Nehemiah 12:29.** *The house of Gilgal* Or, “Beth-Gilgal” — probably the Gilgal north of Jerusalem (now “Jiljilia”).

^{<6123>}**Nehemiah 12:31.** *I brought up* Note the resumption of the first person, which has been laid aside since ^{<6075>}Nehemiah 7:5, and which is confirmed now to the end of the book. It is generally allowed that we have here once more a memoir by Nehemiah himself.

The two “companies” or choirs, having ascended the wall on its western face, near the modern Jaffa Gate, stood looking eastward toward the city and temple; then the southern choir, being on the right, commenced the circuit of the southern wall, while the choir upon the left proceeded round the northern wall (^{<6128>}Nehemiah 12:38-39), until both met on the eastern wall, between the water and the prison gates.

^{<6123>}**Nehemiah 12:34.** “Judah and Benjamin” are the lay people of those two tribes.

^{<6127>}**Nehemiah 12:37.** *Above the house of David* This choir or procession went above (or beyond) the old palace of David, following the line described in ^{<14816>}Nehemiah 3:16-26, on their way to the eastern wall.

^{<6124>}**Nehemiah 12:44.** *Judah rejoiced* Judah’s satisfaction with the priests and Levites took the shape of increased offerings, more ample tithes, and the like, from where the appointment of treasuries and treasurers became necessary.

~~<6124>~~ **Nehemiah 12:45.** *The ward of the purification* The observances with respect to purification. Compare ~~<1323>~~ 1 Chronicles 23:28.

~~<6124>~~ **Nehemiah 12:47.** The intention is to compare the religious activity and strictness of Nehemiah's time with that which had prevailed under Zerubbabel, as described by Ezra (~~<1516>~~ Ezra 6:16,22). It is implied that the intermediate period had been a time of laxity.

They sanctified holy things ... i.e, "the people paid their tithes regularly to the Levites, and the Levites paid the tithe of the tithes to the priests."

NOTES ON NEHEMIAH 13

Nehemiah 13:1. *On that day* Or, “at that time,” as in ^{<1624>}Nehemiah 12:44.

The entire Pentateuch is probably meant by “the Book of Moses”.

Nehemiah 13:3. A separation like that made by Ezra, some 20 years previously (^{<1505>}Ezra 10:15-44), seems to be intended. The pagan wives were divorced and sent back, with their offspring, to their own countries.

Nehemiah 13:4. The relations of Eliashib, the high priest (^{<1498>}Nehemiah 3:1), with Tobiah and Sanballat will account for the absence of any reference to him either in Nehemiah 8—10, or in ^{<1627>}Nehemiah 12:27-47.

The chamber The entire outbuilding, or “lean-to,” which surrounded the temple on three sides (^{<1005>}1 Kings 6:5-10).

Allied i.e., “connected by marriage.” Tobiah was married to a Jewess (^{<1468>}Nehemiah 6:18), who may have been a relation of Eliashib; and his son Johanan was married to another (^{<1468>}Nehemiah 6:18), of whom the same may be said.

Nehemiah 13:5. *The offerings of the priests* i.e. “the portion of the offerings assigned for their sustenance to the priests.”

Nehemiah 13:6. *Artaxerxes king of Babylon* See ^{<1601>}Nehemiah 1:1. Compare ^{<1362>}Ezra 6:22, where Darius Hystaspis is called “king of Assyria.”

After certain days Or, “at the end of a year,” which is a meaning that the phrase often has (^{<1210>}Exodus 13:10; ^{<1259>}Leviticus 25:29,30; ^{<1492>}Numbers 9:22). Nehemiah probably went to the court at Babylon in 433 B.C., and returned to Jerusalem 432 B.C.

Nehemiah 13:9. *The chambers* The “great chamber” assigned to Tobiah (^{<1435>}Nehemiah 13:5) contained, it would seem, more than one apartment.

Nehemiah 13:10. etc. During Nehemiah’s absence there had been a general falling away, and there was danger of a complete national apostasy.

<6631> **Nehemiah 13:11.** *I gathered them together* Nehemiah gathered the Levites from their lands, and reinstated them in their set offices.

<6635> **Nehemiah 13:15.** The desecration of the Sabbath is first brought into prominence among the sins of the Jewish people by Jeremiah (<2472> Jeremiah 17:21-27). It could not but have gained ground during the captivity, when foreign masters would not have allowed the cessation of labor for one day in seven. On the return from the captivity, the sabbatical rest appears to have been one of the institutions most difficult to re-establish.

In the day Some render, “concerning the day.”

<6636> **Nehemiah 13:16.** Friendly relations subsisted between the Phoenicians and the Jews, after the captivity (<4517> Ezra 3:7). It was, however, a new fact, and one pregnant with evil consequences, that the Tyrians should have established a permanent colony at Jerusalem. Its influence on the other inhabitants weakened the hold of the Law upon men’s consciences, and caused it to be transgressed continually more and more openly.

<6639> **Nehemiah 13:19.** The gates were closed at the sunset of the day before the Sabbath; since the Sabbath was regarded as commencing on the previous evening.

<6632> **Nehemiah 13:21.** The lodging of the merchants with their merchandise just outside Jerusalem during the Sabbath, marked their impatience for the moment when they might bring their wares in. This was thought by Nehemiah to be unseemly, and to have an irreligious tendency.

<6632> **Nehemiah 13:22.** *I commanded the Levites* At first Nehemiah had employed his own retinue (<6639> Nehemiah 13:19) in the work of keeping the gates. He now assigned the duty to the Levites, as one which properly belonged to them, since the object of the regulation was the due observance of the Sabbath.

<6634> **Nehemiah 13:24.** *The speech of Ashdod* The Philistine language, which was akin to that of Egypt.

According to the language of each people The children spoke a mixed dialect — half-Philistine, half-Hebrew.

^{<6133>}**Nehemiah 13:30.** *The wards* Rather, “the offices or observances.”
Nehemiah’s arrangement is probably that described in ^{<6110>}Nehemiah 11:10-22.