

Nehemiah 2

Verses 1- 8

And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I picked up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.² So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, though you are not ill? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid.³ And I said to the king, “May the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the site of my fathers’ tombs, is desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?”⁴ Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.⁵ Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, I request that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”⁶ Then the king said to me, with the queen sitting beside him, “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.⁷ And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, so that they will allow me to pass through until I come to Judah,⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel 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.

And it came about in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, that wine was before him, and I picked up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

This was four months after the time mentioned in chapter 1

² So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, though you are not ill? This is nothing but sadness of heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

This king had some genuine compassion for his staff; however, there was a limit to the sadness that could be shown.

See Esther 4:2

² And he came as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and mourning rites; and many had sackcloth and ashes spread out as a bed.

Nehemiah knew the limit that could be shown to the king.

³ And I said to the king, “May the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad when the city, the site of my fathers' tombs, is desolate and its gates have been consumed by fire?”

Nehemiah tried to keep his request as personal as possible because he knew that the king had ruled against the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the not too distant past.

⁴ Then the king said to me, “What would you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, I request that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

Nehemiah wanted to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem which the King had ruled against.

See chart 205

Kings of Persia		559 to 330 BC	
King	Reign (BC)	Events	Year
Xerxes I (Ahashuerus)	485-465		
	Ezra 4:6	Samaritans send letter to the king	485
		Esther becomes queen	479
Artaxerxes (Longimanus)	465-424		
	Ezra 4:7	Samaritans send letter to the king	465 - 460
	Ezra 4:12	Jews working on the wall	465 - 460
	Ezra 4:23	Work stopped shortly after it began	465 - 460
	2nd return	Ezra sent to Jerusalem	458
	3rd return	Nehemiah rebuilds the wall	445
		Nehemiah's 2nd return	430
Xerxes II	424		

The previous decision by Artaxerxes to stop the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem was made 15 to 20 years ago but for him to reverse a previous judgment was unheard of in the Persian Kingdom. Did the king forget about his previous decision or did God intervene for the sake of Israel? Verse 8 would seem to suggest the later.

6 Then the king said to me, with the queen sitting beside him, “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.

The journey would require three or four months each direction plus whatever time might be needed to rebuilt the walls around the city. It seems likely that he would have requested a year or two. However, Nehemiah's first term as governor lasted twelve years.

See Nehemiah 5:14

14 Furthermore, since the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance.

We must assume that his leave of absence was extended, because it is very unlikely that he would have asked for this amount of time or that the king would have allowed it.

7 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River, so that they will allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, ⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, so that he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel 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 had put a lot of forethought into this mission and asked the king for all of the necessary documents and letters he would need to make the journey to Jerusalem and the needed supplies for the rebuilding of the city walls.

A citadel is a stronghold into which people could go for shelter during a battle.

See pic 210



The Samaritans had warned the king of Jerusalem's prior revolts so why would Artaxerxes now allow a stronghold in Jerusalem? Perhaps the Samaritans, under governor Sanballat, had grown too powerful and the king wanted to checkmate the power of Sanballat in Samaria.

Verses 9 - 16

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the *Euphrates* River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ And 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. ¹¹ So I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. ¹² And I got up 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. ¹³ So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Spring and on to the Dung Gate, and I was inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which had been consumed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵ So I was going up at night by the ravine and inspecting the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. ¹⁶ However, the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who were doing the work.

⁹ Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the *Euphrates* River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ And 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.

This was bad news to Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, because the presence of a military escort meant Nehemiah had real authority and he knew his letter from the king that was now 15 to 20 years old must have been rescinded. This assumption is based on the fact that Sanballat never tried to stop the work based on this older letter from the king. He will ask Nehemiah if he is rebelling against the king but Sanballat knew better because he arrived with a detachment from the king.

¹² And I got up 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.

We are not told who went with Nehemiah but since he did not know who he could trust at this point, it seems reasonable to assume he took a few of the horsemen who had come to Jerusalem with him on the journey.

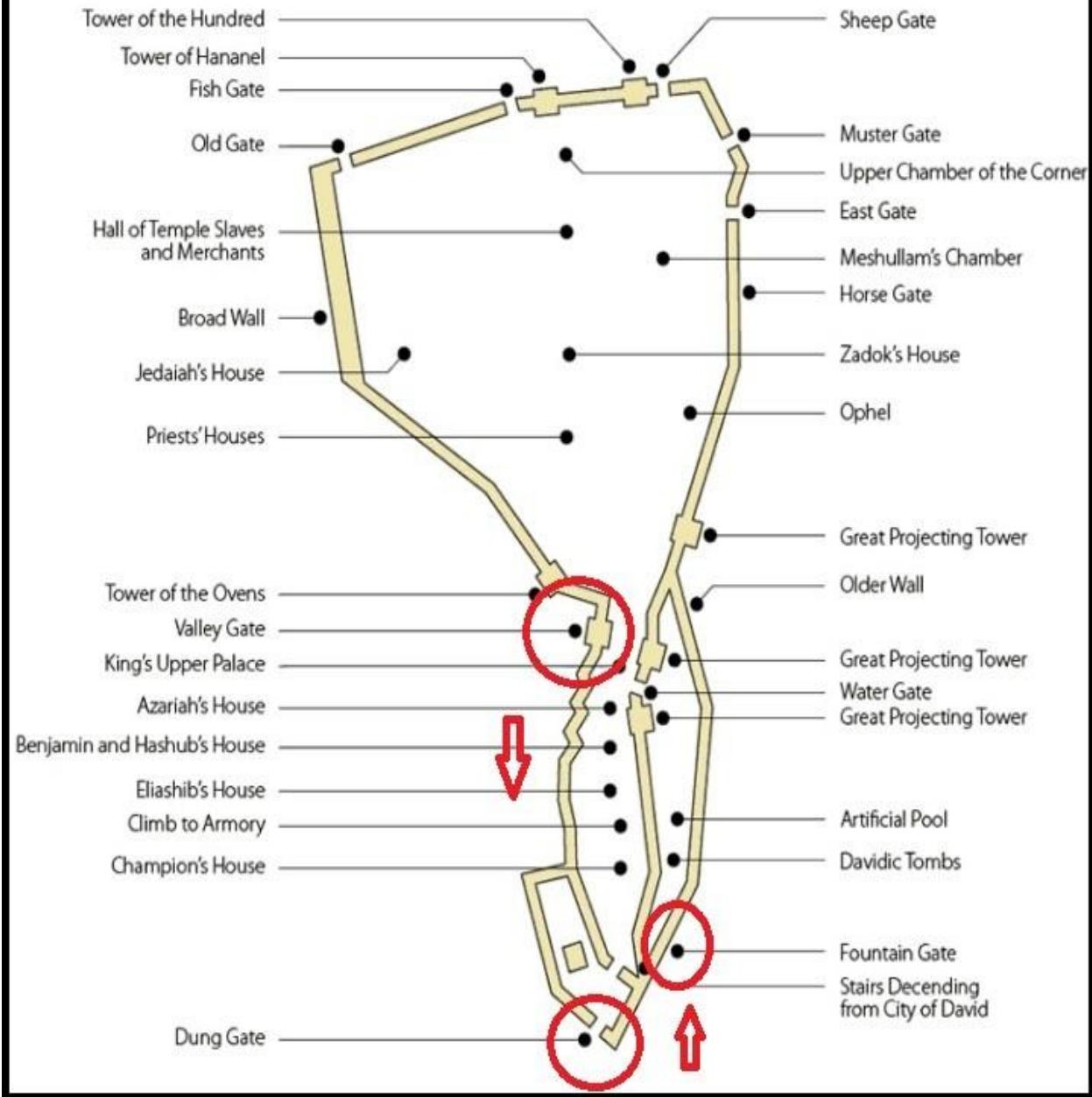
One has to admire the wisdom and ability of Nehemiah. He developed his plan of action to rebuild the walls but he concealed it from anyone who might have the ability to hinder it.

¹³ So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Spring and on to the Dung Gate, and I was inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which had been consumed by fire. ¹⁴ Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵ So I was going up at night by the ravine and inspecting the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned.

There were 10 gates around the city but Nehemiah only visited 3 of them. At the Fountain Gate Nehemiah had to dismount and continue on foot because the terrain was too difficult to pass. The steep slopes on the eastern side had been built with huge stone terraces and when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city the terraces and buildings collapsed into the valley below, so Nehemiah had to return to the Valley gate

See map 215 below

Jerusalem's Wall in Nehemiah's Day

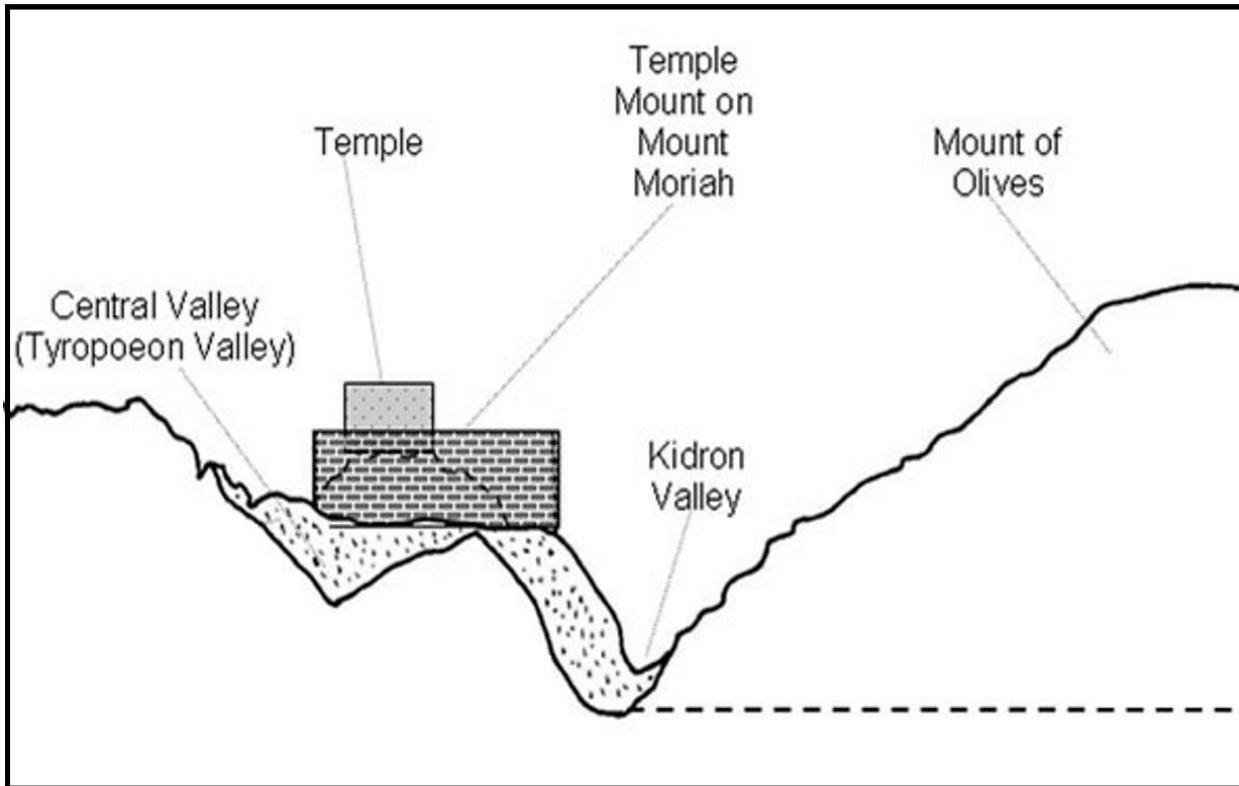


The following pictures provide a fuller understanding of the layout and obstacles that made working on the wall around the city somewhat difficult.

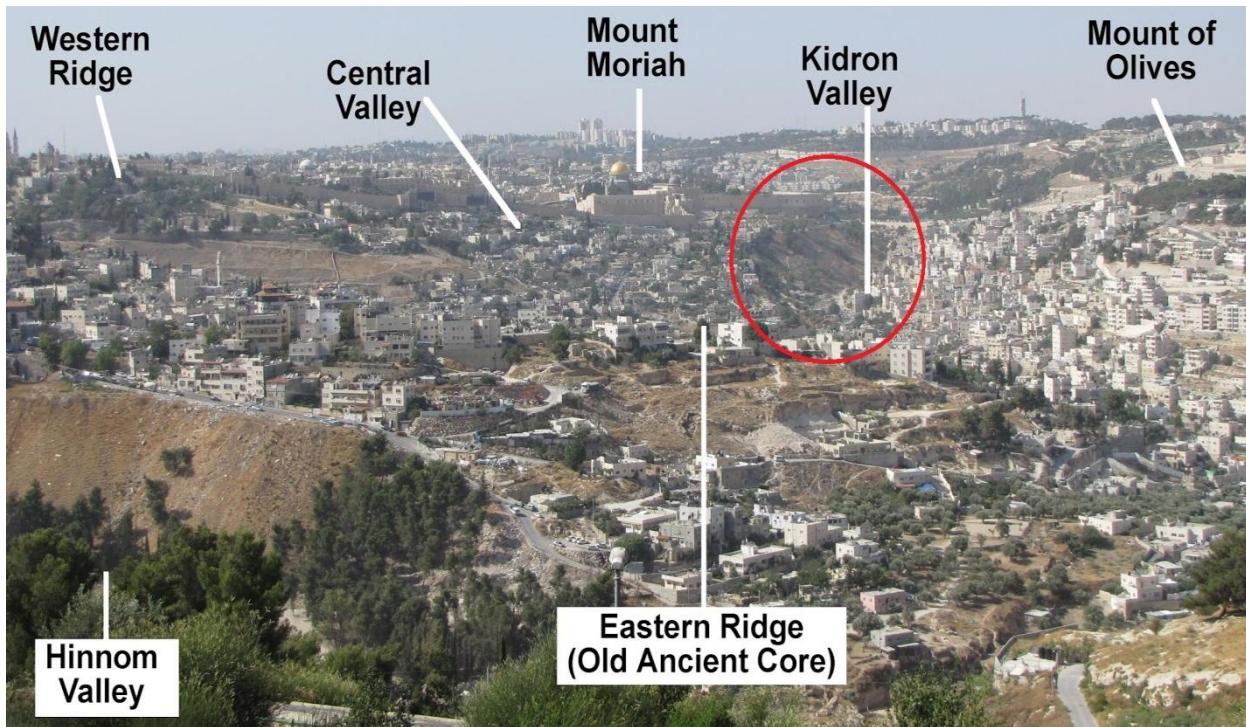
The east side of the temple had a very steep decline because of the Kidron Valley.

See pics 220 thru 222

Pic 220



pic 221



A view from the Mount of Olives which is on the opposite side of the Kidron valley provides an excellent view of the eastern slope.

See pic 222



Verses 17 - 20

¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been burned by fire. Come, let’s rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace.” ¹⁸ And 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’s arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work. ¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *about it*, they mocked us and despised us, and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” ²⁰ So I answered them and said to them, “The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem.”

¹⁷ Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates have been burned by fire. Come, let’s rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a disgrace.”

It had been almost 100 years since the 1st group had come to Jerusalem and the walls of the city still laid in ruins.

See chart 225

Exile to Babylon and return to Jerusalem		
Events		Year
Cyrus releases Jews	1st Return	539
Work on Second temple begins		538
Work stopped	15 years	536 - 520
Haggai		520
Zechariah		520-518
Work begins again		520
Second temple dedicated		516
Accusation against Judah	Ezra 4:6	485
Esther becomes queen		479
Work on the wall stopped	Ezra 4:7-23	465-445
Ezra sent to Jerusalem	2nd return	458
Nehemiah rebuilds the wall	3rd return	445
Nehemiah's 2nd return		430

And 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’s arise and build.”

Nehemiah explained to the people his full power and permission from the king and the response of the people was spontaneous and jubilant.

¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard *about it*, they mocked us and despised us, and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” ²⁰ So I answered them and said to them, “The God of heaven will make us successful; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no part, right, or memorial in Jerusalem.”

The same old enemies responded in their usual fashion but Nehemiah and all the men of Jerusalem knew that the Lord was with them.

It should be noted that the walls were built after the work of Ezra, when the people had put away their pagan wives and made a covenant with the Lord about keeping his Law.