

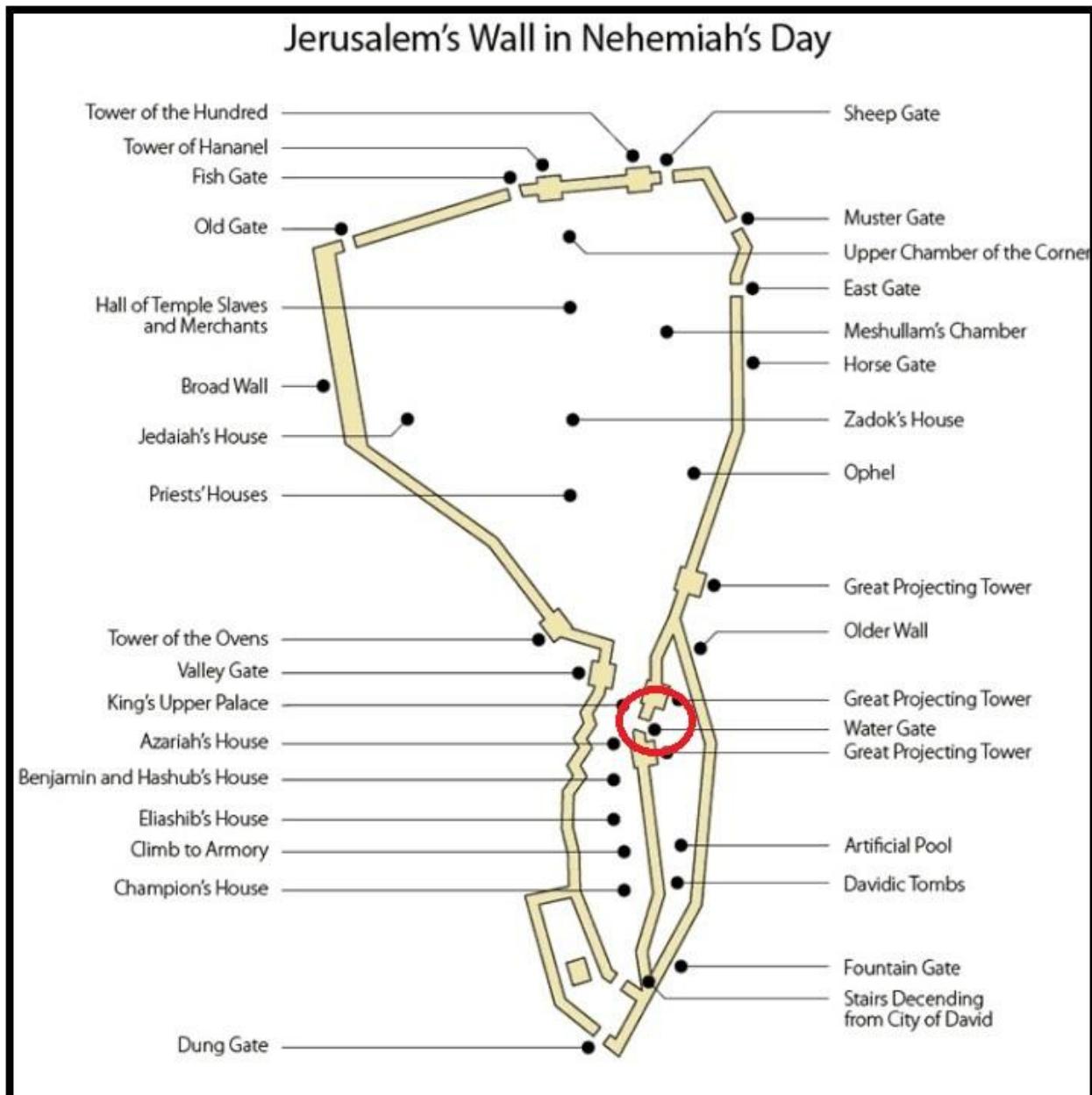
## Nehemiah 8

Verse 1

**And all the people gathered as one person at the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.**

See pic 805

The Water Gate



## Verses 2

**<sup>2</sup> Then Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.**

The completion of the wall occurred on the 25th day of the 6th month, a few days before the New Year. The name "Rosh Hashanah" means "head of the year" or "first of the year."

See chart 810

Jewish Feasts						
Feast	Scripture	Date Observed	Roman Calendar	Sabbath	Offerings	Commemorates
Passover	Lev. 23:05	Nisan 14 At twilight	March/April	No	Numbers 28:16-24	Oldest son saved from death
Festival of Unleavened Bread	Lev. 23:6-8	Nisan 15-21	March/April	Day 1 & 7 Spec Sabbath	Numbers 28:16-24	The hasty flight from Egypt
Offering the First Fruits	Lev. 23:9-14	After the Sabbath	March/April	No	Numbers 28:16-24	Beginning of the barley harvest
Feast Of Weeks (Pentecost)	Lev. 23:15-22	50 days after F.F.	May/June	Special Sabbath	Numbers 28:26-31	beginning of the wheat harvest.
Festival of Trumpets	Lev. 23:23-25	Tishri 1	September	Special Sabbath	Numbers 29:1-6	Civil New Year
Day of Atonement	Lev. 23:26-32	Tishri 10	Sept/Oct	Sabbath	Numbers 29:7-11	Forgiveness of sin for the nation
Tabernacles Temp. Shelters	Lev. 23:33-34	Tishri 15-22	Sept/Oct	Day 1 & 8 Spec Sabbath	Numbers 29:12-38	Wilderness End of harvest

The 1st day of Tishri was the Civil New Year and the beginning of the Sacred Year.

See chart 815

The Jewish Calendar			
The Jews used two types of calendars			
Month Name	Corresponds to	Civil Year	Sacred Year
Tishri	Sep-Oct	1st	7th
Heshvan	Oct-Nov	2nd	8th
Chislev	Nov-Dec	3rd	9th
Tebeth	Dec-Jan	4th	10th
Shebat	Jan-Feb	5th	11th
Adar	Feb-Mar	6th	12th
Nisan	Mar-Apr	7th	1st
Iyar	Apr-May	8th	2nd
Sivan	May-Jun	9th	3rd
Tammuz	Jun-Jul	10th	4th
Ab	Jul-Aug	11th	5th
Elul	Aug-Sep	12th	6th

Verses 3 – 4

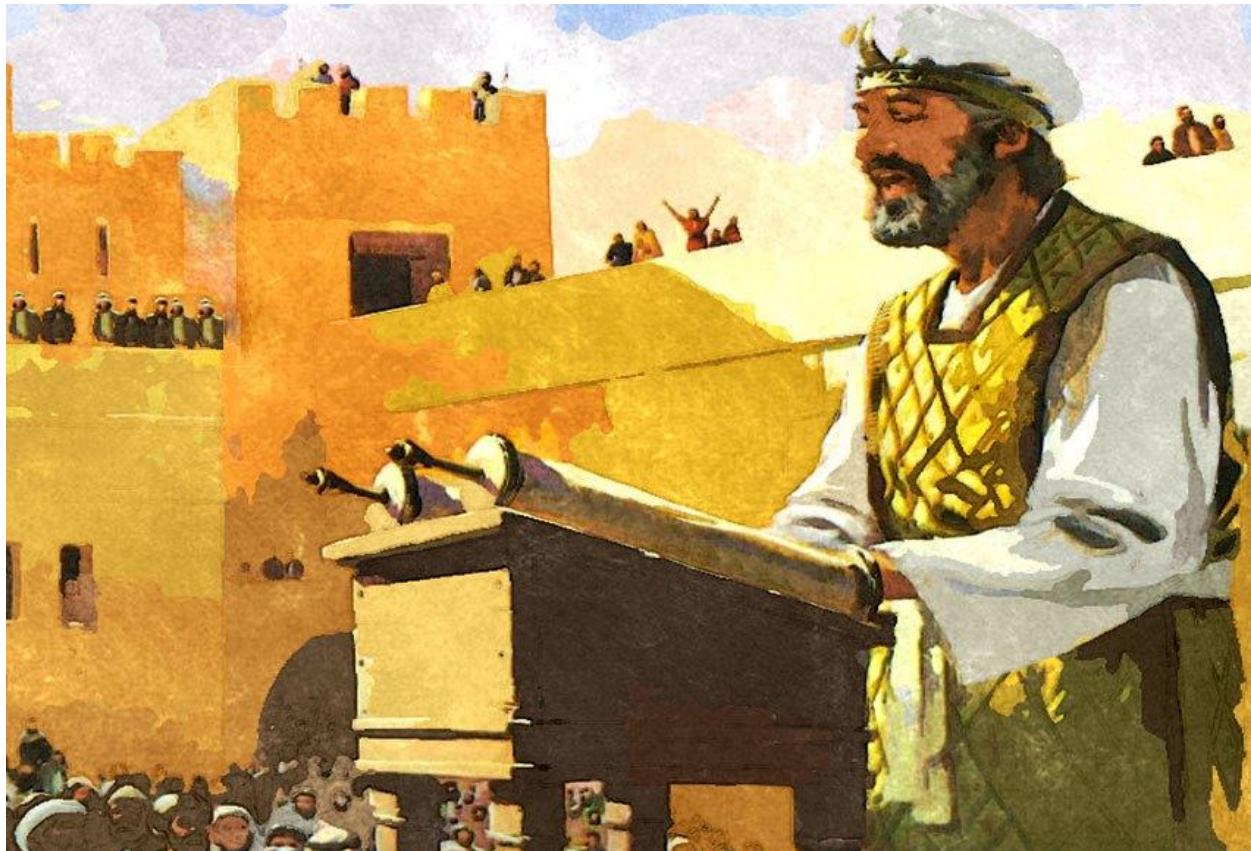
<sup>3</sup> And he read from it before the public square which was in front of the Water Gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left.

Given the times there were no personal copies of the Law that people could read at their leisure, so this reading of God's word was a time of great privilege.

A wooden podium was made for this event so Ezra could roll out the scroll and read it with greater ease. Someone snapped a pic of this moment with their phone. ☺

See pic 820



Verses 5 - 8

<sup>5</sup> Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. <sup>6</sup> Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the Lord with *their* faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

<sup>5</sup> Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

This was a sign of their respect for God's word. One has to wonder if they remained standing from "early morning until midday".

<sup>6</sup> Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" with the raising of their hands; then they kneeled down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

This isn't practical in most modern churches because of the pews or chairs that fill our auditoriums but one has to wonder if current day Christians would prostrate themselves before the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Law to the people while the people remained in their place. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

Since many of the people had been born and raised in Babylon it is likely that a portion of them were not fluent in the Hebrew language which meant it needed to be translated into Aramaic and the culture of the Jews had changed enough that some of the cultural nuances needed to be explained.

Verses 9 - 12

<sup>9</sup> Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest *and* scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go, eat the festival foods, drink the sweet drinks, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your refuge." <sup>11</sup> So the Levites silenced all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." <sup>12</sup> Then all the people went away to eat, drink, to send portions, and to celebrate a great feast, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

<sup>9</sup> Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Law.

We don't know if the ministry of Ezra & Nehemiah overlapped much but this was the only time that they were mentioned together in the two books.

See chart 825

Nehemiah Time Line			
Chapter	Events		Year
	Cyrus releases Jews	1st Return	539
	Second temple dedicated		516
	Work on the walls stopped	Ezra 4:7-23	465 to 445
	Reforms of Ezra	2nd return	458
1	Nehemiah in Susa	3rd return	445
2	His trip to Jerusalem	several months	445
3	Rebuilding of the wall begins		445
4	Enemies of Israel		445
5	Nehemiah helps the poor		445
6	The wall completed	52 days	445
7	Two governors appointed		445
8	Ezra reads the law		444
9	Israelites confess their sin	1-24	444
10	Binding agreement signed		444
11	1/10th move to Jerusalem		444
12	Dedication of the wall	9-25?	444
13	Nehemiah returns to Persia	32nd year	433
13	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem		430
13	Final reforms		430

The reforms of Ezra took place during a 5 month period in 458 BC and the only other mention of him is in 444 BC when he reads the law to the people after the wall was completed. Nehemiah on the other hand was active in Jerusalem from 445 BC to 433 BC.

This was New Year's Day, a day of celebration for the Jews, but the people were mourning because their hearts were pricked when they heard the law. They were reminded that it was the sin of their ancestors that had caused the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and their 70 years of captivity. In addition some of those who were now free and living in Jerusalem had broken the law by marrying foreigners and others had been charging interest to their fellow Jews. This is why they had made so little progress in the last 100 years since they were released by Cyrus.

**<sup>11</sup> So the Levites silenced all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” <sup>12</sup> Then all the people went away to eat, drink, to send portions, and to celebrate a great feast, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.**

The word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword and the people couldn't help being sad but it was a day for rejoicing so the Levites reminded the people that they should eat, drink, and celebrate because this was a holy day to the Lord.

Verses 13 - 18

**<sup>13</sup> Then on the second day the heads of fathers' *households* of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe so that they might gain insight into the words of the Law. <sup>14</sup> And they found written in the Law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. <sup>15</sup> And that they were to proclaim and circulate a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of *other* trees with thick branches, to make booths, as it is written.” <sup>16</sup> So the people went out and brought *them* and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courtyards and in the courtyards of the house of God, and in the public square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. <sup>17</sup> The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths. Indeed, the sons of Israel had not done so since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was very great rejoicing. <sup>18</sup> He read from the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day *there was* a festive assembly in accordance with the ordinance.**

<sup>13</sup> **Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe so that they might gain insight into the words of the Law.**

The previous day all the people heard the law and then on the next day the family heads were instructed and it was their responsibility to communicate the teachings to their families.

<sup>14</sup> **And they found written in the Law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.**

This gives us a good indication of how little the people knew. Basic knowledge about one of their holy days was something new to them. The 70 years of captivity had done some harm but as we are about to see this lack of knowledge about their faith went back a lot farther than the captivity.

Scholars often argue that the synagogue began during the Babylonian captivity but their lack of knowledge concerning this feast seems to refute that idea. Perhaps it was during the silent years, sometime after 400 BC.

<sup>15</sup> **And that they were to proclaim and circulate a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of other trees with thick branches, to make booths, as it is written."**

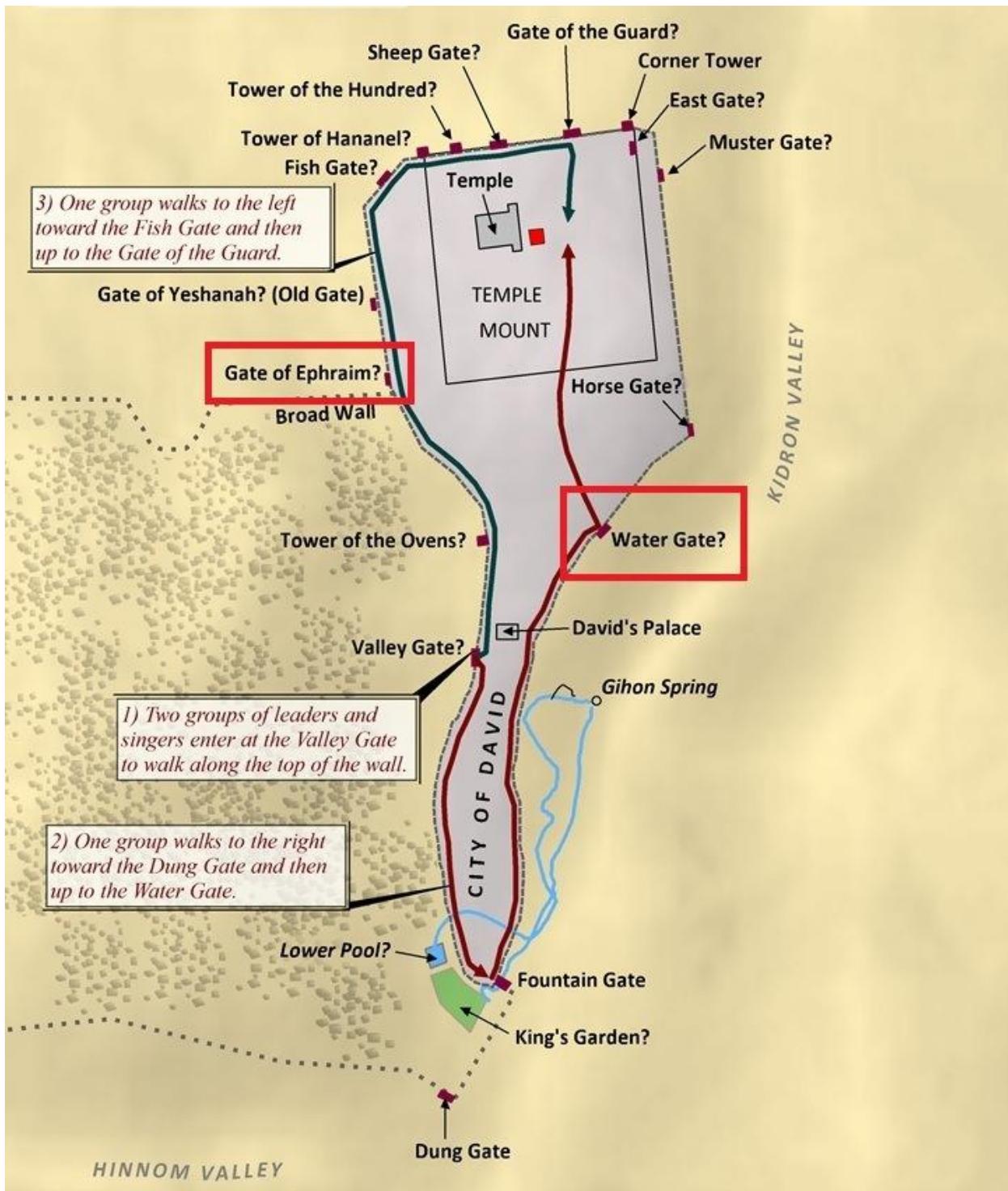
See Leviticus 23:39 - 40

<sup>39</sup> **'On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. <sup>40</sup> Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and branches of trees with thick branches and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days.**

<sup>16</sup> **So the people went out and brought *them* and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courtyards and in the courtyards of the house of God, and in the public square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.**

Those who had houses within the temple mount used their roof and/or their courtyards while others used the public square at the water Gate or the square at the gate of Ephraim.

See map 830



<sup>17</sup> The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths. Indeed, the sons of Israel had not done so since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was very great rejoicing.

The important phrase here is “The entire assembly made booths and lived in them”.

This feast had been observed by Solomon and by Zerubbabel but there was no indication that all of the people made booths and lived in them.

See 2 Chronicles 8:12 -13

<sup>12</sup> Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of the Lord which he had built in front of the porch; <sup>13</sup> and *he did so according to the daily rule, offering them up according to the commandment of Moses, for the Sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths.*

See Ezra 3:4

<sup>4</sup> *They also celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the prescribed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;*

In both cases, there is no indication that the whole community celebrated it by living in booths.

It should be noted that the Jews had not followed this requirement of the law for over 900 years. By not living in booths during the week of booths they were breaking the law because they failed to follow all of the requirements of the feast. God had told the people not to add to or take away from the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> He read from the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day *there was a festive assembly in accordance with the ordinance.*

It makes one wonder what other requirements they knew nothing about and how they responded to those parts of the law.