How Nehemiah felt called

1 "The words of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, I was in the Citadel of Susa when Hanani, one of my brothers, came with some men from Judah. I asked them about the Jewish survivors who had returned from exile and about Jerusalem.

2 They answered me, "The people now live there in the province, in the midst of great poverty and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates burned."

3 When I heard these words, I sat down, wept and mourned for days. I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

4 May your ears be attentive and your eyes open to listen to the prayer of your servant! I am now in your presence day and night, for your servants, the children of Israel. I confess to you the sins we children of Israel have committed against you: I myself and the family of my father have sinned. 7 We have acted very badly. We did not fulfill your commandments, laws and instructions which you gave to your servant Moses.

5 But remember, too, what you said to Moses: If you are not faithful to me, I will scatter you among the nations.

6 But if you fulfill my commandments and put them into practice, I shall again lead you back to the place where I have chosen to dwell. I shall gather you, though you be dispersed to the ends of the world.

7 So then, Lord, do not forget that they are your servants; they are your people, whom you have saved with your great power and strong hand.

8 Listen to my prayer and to the prayer of those who only wish to honor your Name. I ask you to help me now. May I be well received by the king."

I was then in charge of preparing the drinks of the king.

Nehemiah gives up everything to go to Jerusalem

1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, I was doing my duty as cupbearer. I took up the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad before the king in the kindness of more powerful countries, but from their own conversion.

Nehemiah is an example of all those who are able to recognize the voice of the Lord through events and who do not wait for a special call to get to work. There is no doubt that every Christian, trusting in God, is called to discover and achieve what God expects for the salvation of the world, just as Nehemiah did.

- 1.1 Nehemiah served in the palace of King Artaxerxes as cupbearer, a high position at a time when kings were afraid of being poisoned.

- He is a man whose future is assured: yet, he leaves everything to serve God.

- Nehemiah’s vocation comes from:
  - His great trust in God’s promises.
  - An understanding of history which only a believer can have: Jews need not blame anyone else for their difficult situation. Their own sins are the cause of their misfortunes. They must not expect their national restoration to come from

- 2.1 Nehemiah asks and receives because he is not a nuisance, and his years of loyal service
The high priest Eliashib and his brothers, the priests, were esteemed and respected. His discretion and initiative are underscored and his fervent words encourage skeptics whom he persuades.

Was it necessary to build the walls of Jerusalem? In fact, more than the restoration, the Bible stresses the way it was achieved: by calling for everyone’s cooperation, Nehemiah builds up the morale of the Jerusalem community.

The past. So, the king said to me, “Why do you look sad? You don’t look sick. Is there something that bothers you?”

I became hesitant. And I said, “May the king live forever! How could I afford not to be sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates are burned down?” The king said to me, “What do you want, then?” I asked help of God from heaven and said to the king, “If it seems good to the king and if he is pleased with my work, then may he send me to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, that I may rebuild it.”

The queen was sitting beside the king, and the king asked me, “How long will you be gone? When will you be back?” I told him the date and he allowed me to leave. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, may you give me letters for the governors of the province at the other side of the River that I may travel to Judah, and also a letter to Asaph, the caretaker of the king’s forest, for I will need wood for the gates of the Citadel near the Temple, for the walls of the city and for the house where I shall live.”

The good hand of God was supporting me, so that the king gave me what I asked. I went to the governors at the other side of the River, and delivered to them the letters of the king. The king had ordered that I be accompanied by officers of the army and horsemen. But Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah, the Ammonite officer, came to know of my arrival and it displeased them that someone had come to help the Israelites.

I came to Jerusalem and was there for three days. Then I arose in the night, accompanied by a few men, without telling anyone what my God had inspired me and what I planned to do in Jerusalem.

Bringing along only the horse on which I rode, I went out by night by the Gate of the Garbage Dump, I inspected the ruined wall of Jerusalem and the burned gates.

I went on to the Fountain Gate and the King’s Reservoir, but my horse could not pass through anywhere. So I went up, in the night, by the ravine. I inspected the wall and turned back, entering by the Valley Gate.

So I returned to the house. The counselors did not know where I had been or what I was doing. Until that time I had not yet told any of the Jews or the counselors, or the priests or the nobles, or any of those in public office.

Then I said to them, “You yourselves see the misery we are in because Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and put an end to this humiliating situation.” And I recounted to them how the good hand of God had helped me, and what the king had told me. Everyone said, “Let us begin the work.” And they encouraged one another to make this good work a reality.

Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite officer and Geshem the Arab heard of this. They laughed at us and came to tell us, “What are you doing? You are rebelling against the king.” I answered them, “The God of heaven shall grant us success. We, his servants, are now going to build. But as for you, you have neither right nor inheritance nor anything to do with Jerusalem.”

They begin to build the wall
trusted with the building of the Sheep Gate. They built it, set its doors and continued as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 The people of Jericho worked at their side, and farther on, Zaccur, son of Imri. 3 The Fish Gate was assigned to the sons of Hassenaah. They set up and fixed its doors, bolts and bars.

Next to them, Meremoth, son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, and Meshullam, son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel built the next section and at their side, Zadok, son of Baana, repaired another section. 4 At their side, the inhabitants of Tekoa worked, but their nobles wanted not to labor in the service of their Lord.

The Old Gate was repaired by Joiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah. They set up and fixed the gate with its bolts and bars.

Next to them worked Malatiah of Gibeon and Yadan of Meronot with the people of Gibeon and Mizpah, beside the house of the provincial governor. 6 Next to them worked Uzziel, of the jewellers’ guild. Next were Hananiah, of the perfumers’ guild: they strengthened Jerusalem as far as the Wall of the Square. 7 Next to them repairs were carried out by Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem. 8 Next to them Jedaiah son of Harumaph worked opposite his own house; next to him repairs were carried out by Hattush son of Hashabneiah. 9 Malchijah son of Harim and Hasshub, son of Pahath-moab repaired the next section as far as the Tower of the Furnaces. 10 Next to them worked Shallum son of Halloesh, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. 11 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate; they restored it, constructed its framework and set its doors, bolts and bars in place, and repaired a thousand cubits of wall up to the Dung Gate. 12 Malchijah son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Bethaccherem, repaired the Dung Gate, he and his sons: he set its doors, bolts and bars in place. 13 Shalum, son of Colhozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, worked at the Fountain Gate; he built it, covered it, and set its doors, bolts and bars in place. He also rebuilt the wall of the conduit cistern, adjoining the king’s garden, as far as the steps coming down from the Citadel of David. 14 Next to him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, worked up to a point opposite the tombs of David, the artificial pool and the House of Heroes. 15 Next to him worked the Levites: Rehum son of Bani and next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, for his own district. 16 Next to them worked their brothers: Binnui son of Henadad, ruler of half the district of Keilah; 17 next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, opposite the slope up to the Armory, towards the Angle.

20 Next to him Baruch son of Zabbai worked from the Angle as far as the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 Next to him Meremoth son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz from the door of Eliashib’s house to its farther end. 22 Next to him worked the priests who lived there. 23 Next to them worked Benjamin and Hasshub, opposite their own houses. Next to them Azariah son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, beside his own house. 24 Next to him Binnui son of Henadad from the house of Azariah up to the Angle. 25 Next to him Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the corner of the tower jutting out over the upper palace of the king near the prison courtyard. Next to him Pedaiah son of Parosh worked as far as the Water Gate, in an easterly direction and up to a point opposite the projecting tower. 26 Next to him the men of Tekoa worked opposite the great tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

28 From the Horse Gate onwards repairs were carried out by the priests, each opposite his own house.
them worked Zadok son of Immer opposite his own house. Next to him Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, keeper of the East Gate. Next to him Hananiah son of Shelemiah and Hanun sixth son of Zalaph. Next to him Meshullam son of Berechiah worked opposite where he lived. Next to him Malchijah, of the goldsmiths’ guild, repaired as far as the quarters of the helpers and the merchants, opposite the Watch Gate as far as the high chamber of the corner. And between the high chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate repairs were carried out by the goldsmiths and the merchants.

The enemies try to discourage Nehemiah

• 33 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry. He ridiculed the Jews and said before his brothers and the lords of Samaria, “What are those miserable Jews trying to do? Are they perhaps going to rebuild, finish and celebrate the inauguration in a single day? Do they think they can make stones out of heaps of ruins?”

35 Tobiah the Ammonite who was by him said, “Let them build, for if any fox goes up on their wall, it will surely collapse.”

36 Listen, O our God, for we are despised! May their insult fall back upon their own heads; give them up to contempt in a land where they shall be exiled! Do not cover their guilt nor let their sin be blotted out in your presence, for they have offended those who built.

38 The people worked with all their hearts and we finished half the wall’s height.

1 Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the residents of Azotus saw that the repair of the wall was advancing, and that we had begun covering the holes. They were greatly enraged, and all of them agreed to attack Jerusalem and humiliate me.

3 So we prayed to our God, and set a guard day and night. The people of Judah said, “The strength of the bearers is already failing, and much debris still remains; we can never rebuild the wall.” And our enemies said, “We will take them by surprise before they know it. We will kill them and stop their work.” But some Jews who lived with them came to notify us about this. Ten times they said to us, “From all the places where they live, they shall set out against us.”

7 So I ordered that people be stationed behind the wall, there in the lowest part. I stationed them by families, with their swords, spears, and bows. They were afraid, but I stood up and said to the nobles, the counselors and the rest of the people, “Remember the Lord, great and magnificent, and fight for your brothers, sons and daughters, wives and homes.”

9 When our enemies learned that we had been notified, that God willed that their plans be thwarted, we all returned to the wall, each one to his work.

10 But from that day on, only half of my men worked while the other half, with bows, spears, shields and armor, stood behind all the people of Judah building the wall. The bearers picked up their loads with one hand because they held a weapon with the other hand. Each of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he worked.

• 3.33 Later, Nehemiah’s work arouses jealousy and suspicion. Nothing unusual in that. The firmness of this man alone was enough to inspire everyone. At that very moment, building the Jerusalem walls was the specific task which, if not done, would have stopped sacred history. Had the Jewish people given in and delayed, they would have lost the means to their independence and the meaning of their mission. Similarly today, although the mission of the Church is mostly spiritual, our fidelity to the Lord depends upon our attitude in the face of violations and betrayals of the truth in very specific aspects of social life.
The rich must share the sacrifices of the poor

1 The common people and their wives presented very serious complaints against their Jewish brothers. 2 Some of them said, “We have big families and we need wheat to eat for strength to live.” 3 Others cried out, “We have to mortgage our fields, vineyards and houses to get grain because of this famine.” 4 Others said, “We have borrowed money on account of our fields and vineyards in order to pay the tax to the king.” 5 Though we are of the same race as our brothers and our children are not different from their children, we have to give our sons as slaves; even many of our daughters are now regarded as concubines. And we do not have any other solution, inasmuch as our fields and vineyards have passed on to others.”

5.1 We are of the same race as our brothers. The rulers keep saying that the reconstruction requires sacrifice. The Jewish people demand that the sacrifices be really shared by all. Those who have enough for today must cancel the debts of those who have nothing.

Are you now buying your own brothers? Nehemiah defends the most humble, and denounces the sin the rich have committed without realizing it: driven by the logic of debt and credit, they have come to submit their own people to slavery.

Do you want to imitate our enemies’ customs? We rightfully seek liberation from exploitative and anti-social governments. Finally the exploitative spirit in each one of us may be the last vice to be uprooted.
demanded to be given the governor's bread. But the former governors had collected forty pieces of silver per day from the people. This payment was a burden to the people, and so were their servants.

16 As I dedicated myself to rebuilding the wall, I did not buy fields; and all my men were there helping. 17 At my table a hundred and fifty men, leaders and counselors were seated, besides those who came to us from neighboring nations. 18 A male calf, six choice rams and fowls were slaughtered daily, and every ten days a great quantity of wine was brought. But though all these were charged to my account, I never asked for the governor's bread, because the people were already burdened enough with the task of reconstruction.

19 Remember for my good, my God, all that I have done for this people!

Further opposition to rebuilding

6 1 Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies learned that I had rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem. There was no hole left in it, although the doors had not been set up yet. 2 Then Sanballat and Geshem sent me a message saying, “Come and let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono.”

They intended to do me harm; but I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am much occupied in a very important work, I cannot come down to meet you, for the work would stop if I left it.” 4 They invited me again four times, but I gave them the same answer every time.

5 Then Sanballat invited me for the fifth time. His servant brought an open letter which said the following, 6 “Do you know the news that circulates among those who are not Jews? Gashmu says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel and that is why you are rebuilding the wall. 7 And you also wish to become their king, and have already chosen prophets to proclaim you king of Jerusalem. The king shall know of this, so come, that the two of us may talk.”

8 But I sent to him, saying, “There’s nothing true in what you say; you have invented this story.” 9 For they all wanted to frighten us, saying: “Let us discourage them that they may not finish the work.”

But I, on the contrary, worked with greater strength. 10 Then I went to Shemaiah, son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, since he could not leave his house. He said to me, “Let us meet together in the House of God, within the sanctuary, and then close its doors, for they are coming to kill you, to strike you this very night.”

11 But I answered him, “Should a man like me flee? Why should a man like me seek sanctuary to save my life? I will not go.” 12 I understood then that Semaiah had not been sent by God but that Tobiah and Sanballat had brought him to frighten me. In hiding in the sanctuary, I would have committed an offense, and this would have damaged my reputation and put me to shame.

13 O my God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done; and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who tried to frighten me.

14 The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days.

There will always be people who take advantage of God’s word to support governments or to deceive the people.

Note the expression in 6:13 – to frighten me and lead me to sin. Quite often, fear is a slippery way leading to sin.
neighboring nations knew about it, they were afraid and lost courage. They had to recognize the work of God in this.  

17 During that time, several distinguished Jews often wrote to and received letters from Tobiah. 18 Tobiah had many friends in Judah for he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah, and because his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshulam, son of Berechiah. 19 They even came to speak well of Tobiah in my presence, and recounted to him all my words as well. And it was he – Tobiah – who sent letters to frighten me.

7 Then I said to them, “Open the gates of Jerusalem only when the sun begins to get hot, but while it is still day, close and bar the doors while the guards are still at their posts.

And during the night, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall come out to keep guard, some at their posts and others in front of their houses.”

The new population of Jerusalem

4 The city was spacious and wide, but it had few inhabitants and many houses had not been rebuilt. 5 God inspired in me the idea to assemble the leaders, the counselors and the people to take a census. I found the registry book of the census of those who had returned from exile in the beginning. I found the following written in it:

6 These are the people of the province who returned from exile whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported, but returned to Jerusalem and Judea, each to his city:

7 These are the Israelites who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Ramiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mismereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah; here are the numbers:

8 The sons of Parosh, 2,172; 9 those of Shephatiah, 372; 10 those of Arah, 652; 11 those of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818; 12 the sons of Elam, 1,254; 13 those of Zattu, 845; 14 those of Zaccai, 760; 15 those of Binnui, 648; 16 those of Bebai, 628; 17 those of Azgad, 2,322; 18 those of Adonim-kan, 667; 19 those of Bigvai, 2,067; 20 those of Adin, 655; 21 those of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98; 22 those of Hashum, 328; 23 those of Bezai, 324; 24 those of Hariph, 112; 25 those of Gibeon, 95.

26 The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188; 27 those of Anathoth, 128; 28 those of Bethazmaveth, 42; 29 those of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743; 30 those of Ramah and Geba, 621; 31 those of Michmas, 122; 32 those of Bethel and Ai, 123; 33 those of the other Nebo, 52.

34 The sons of the other Elam, 1,254; 35 those of Harim, 320; 36 those of Jericho, 345; 37 those of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721; 38 those of Sennaah, 3,930.

39 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973; 40 those of Immer, 1,052; 41 those of Pashhur, 1,247; 42 those of Harim, 1,017.

43 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.

44 The sons of the other Elam, 1,254.

45 The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, of Shobai, 138.

46 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, of Hasupha, of Tabbaoth, 47 of Keros, of Sia, of Padon, 48 of Lebana, of Hagaba, of Shalmai, 49 of Hanan, of Giddel, of Gahar, 50 of Reai, of Rezin, of Nekoda, 51 of Gazzam, of Uzza, of Paseah, 52 of Besai, of Meunim, of Nephusessim, 53 of Bakbuk, of Hakupha, of Harhur, 54 of Bazlith, of Mehida, of Harsha, 55 of Barkos, of Sisera, of Temah, 56 of Neziah, of Hatipha.

57 The sons of Solomon’s servants: the sons of Sotai, of Sophereth, of Perida, 58 of Jaala, of Darkon, of Giddel, 59 of Shephatiah, of Hattil, of Pochereth-hazzeanaim, of Amon.

60 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon’s servants were 392.

61 And these were they who came up from Telmelah, Telharsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not prove that their families and ancestry were of Israelite origin:

62 the sons of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, 642.

63 And of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz, of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. 64 These people searched for their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood. 65 And the governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest would make a decision through the Urim and Thummim.

66 The whole assembly together was 42,360, besides their male and female ser-
vants: 7,337; and they had 245 male and female singers.

68 They had 736 horses, 245 mules; 69 435 camels; 6,720 donkeys.

70 Some of the heads of families gave offerings for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments.

71 The heads of families gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas and 67 priests' garments.

72 The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas, and 67 priests' garments.

73 The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their cities.

And when the seventh month came, the sons of Israel were in their cities.

Ezra reads the Law

1 In the seventh month, all the people gathered as one man in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which Yahweh had given to Israel.

2 Ezra brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all the children who could understand what was being read. It was the first day of the seventh month.

3 Ezra read the book before all of them from early morning until midday in the square facing the Water Gate; and all who heard were attentive to the Book of the Law.

4 Ezra, the teacher of the Law, stood on a wooden platform built for that occasion and to his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hasbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was in a higher place; and when he opened it, all the people stood. 6 Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God; and all the people lifted up their hands and answered, “Amen! Amen!” And they bowed their heads to the ground.

7 Then the Levites Joshua, Bani and the rest of their brothers explained the Law to the people who were standing. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, clarifying and interpreting the meaning, so that everyone might understand what they were hearing.

9 Then Ezra, the teacher of the Law, said to the people, “This day is dedicated to Yahweh, your God, so do not be sad or weep.” He said this because all wept when they heard the reading of the Law.

10 Then he said to them, “Go and eat rich foods, drink sweet wine and share with him who has nothing prepared.

This day is dedicated to the Lord, so do not be sad. The joy of Yahweh is our strength.”

11 The Levites also calmed the people down, saying, “Do not weep. This day is a festival day. Do not be sad.” 12 And the people went their way to eat, drink and share, and they had a great feast, because they had understood the words that had been proclaimed to them.

13 On the second day, the heads of the families, the priests and the Levites came together to Ezra, the teacher of the Law, in Ezra himself tries to gather and complete the sacred books, and a new age begins wherein the Bible will be everyone's book and the basis of their faith.

This religious and cultural transition is similar in the Church in recent years. People went to church; they prayed and they were taught, but the Bible was foreign to them. However, now the Christian faith can only become strong through the word of God read and heard in the community. Indeed we are behind time: this renewal should have started four centuries ago when Protestantism began.

The assembly gathered by Ezra will serve as the model for the religious life of the Jewish community. The solemn worship in the Jerusa-
order to learn the Law. 14 Then they read that Yahweh had commanded the children of Israel that they should dwell in huts during the feast of the seventh month. 15 Then they proclaimed in all the cities and in Jerusalem: “Go to the mountains and bring branches of olive, pine, myrtle, palm and of any leafy tree to build huts according to what is commanded.”

16 The people went out and brought branches and built huts for themselves on the roofs of their houses, or in their yards, or in the courtyards of the House of Yahweh, or in the square at the Water Gate or in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.

17 The whole assembly of those who had returned from exile built huts and dwelt in them, a thing the Israelites had not done since the days of Joshua, son of Nun. And there was great rejoicing.

18 They read the Book of the Law of God daily, from the first day to the last day of the feast. The feast lasted for seven days as prescribed and there was a solemn assembly on the eighth day.

The Israelites confess their sins

9 * 1 On the twenty-fourth day of that same month, the Israelites assembled to fast. They put on sackcloth and sprinkled dust upon their heads. 2 The race of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners; they stood and confessed their sins and those of their ancestors.

3 They stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh, their God, for three hours. For another three hours, they confessed their sins and bowed before Yahweh, their God.

4 Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani and Chenani stood on the platform of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to Yahweh, their God. 5 Then the Levites: Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethaliah said, “Arise, bless Yahweh, our God, forever and ever. Blessed be your glorious Name which is beyond all blessing and praise.”

Prayer of Ezra

6 Then Ezra said, “You, Yahweh, you alone made the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and all their army, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all, and all the angels of heaven adore you.

7 You, Yahweh, are the God who chose Abram; you brought him out of Ur of Chaldea, and gave him the name Abraham.

8 You found him faithful to you and made with him the Covenant to give him and his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite. And you have fulfilled your word, for you are just.

9 You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and listened to their cry by the Red Sea.

10 You worked signs and wonders against Pharaoh, his ministers and all his people, for you knew that they had treated us harshly, and you have received fame to this day.

11 You divided the sea before our ancestors who passed through the midst of the sea without their feet getting wet. You cast their pursuers into the depths of the sea, as stones fall into the deep waters.

12 You guided them by day with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar
of fire to light for them the way they should follow.

13 You came down upon Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven; you gave them just decisions and laws that express truth, excellent precepts and commandments.

14 You taught them to consecrate the sabbath to you; you gave them commandments, precepts and the Law, through the hand of Moses, your servant.

15 You gave them bread from heaven and told them to satisfy their hunger; you made water gush forth from the rock to quench their thirst, and commanded them to go and take possession of the land which you had sworn to give them.

16 But our fathers became proud and hard-headed, and they did not listen to your commands.

17 They refused to listen and to remember all the marvels you did for them. They hardened their hearts rebelliously and wanted to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you, God of forgiveness, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and rich in kindness, did not abandon them.

18 They even made for themselves a molten calf and said: ‘This is your god, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt,’ and they terribly insulted you and blasphemed you.

19 But you, in your great kindness, did not abandon them in the desert; the pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, by which you showed them the way they should take.

20 You gave them your good Spirit to instruct them; you gave them manna so they could eat, and water to quench their thirst.

21 Forty years you cared for them in the desert and they lacked nothing, neither did their clothes wear out or their feet swell.

22 You gave them kingdoms and lands; you allotted to them the frontier lands. They took possession of the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and the land of Og, king of Bashan.

23 And you multiplied their sons as the stars of heaven, bringing them to the land you promised their fathers.

24 Their children entered and took possession of the land. Before them you crushed the land’s inhabitants, the Canaanites whom you gave into their hands with their kings and all the inhabitants, to do to them as they pleased.

25 They conquered fortified cities and a fertile land, took possession of houses well-stocked, wells ready-hewn, vineyards and olive groves, and fruit trees in great abundance. They ate, were satisfied and grew fat, and they lived comfortably by your great kindness.

26 But then, they were disobedient and they rebelled against you. They threw your Law behind their backs, they killed your prophets and they terribly blasphemed you.

27 You handed them over to their enemies who oppressed them. In their oppression they cried to you, and you listened to them from heaven, so by your immense kindness, you sent them saviors who freed them from their oppressors.

28 But when they were at peace, they did evil against you again, and you gave them over to the hands of the enemies who oppressed them. Once more they cried to you, and you listened to them from heaven, and by your great kindness you saved them many times.

29 Insistently, you asked them to return to your Law, but they were very proud, so they did not listen to your commands and decisions. They did not observe what people should fulfill to have life. They turned their backs and did not listen to you for they were hard-headed.
30 You were patient with them for many years. You admonished them by your Spirit through the mouth of the prophets; but they did not listen.

Then you gave them over into the hands of the peoples of these countries.

31 But because of your great kindness, you did not let them be destroyed, nor did you abandon them, for you are a God of kindness and mercy.

32 Now then, our God, great, powerful and fearsome God, you who keep your covenant and your love, take into account this misery which has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people since the time of the kings of Assyria to the present day.

33 You have shown yourself just in all that has happened, for you have faithfully fulfilled your promises, but we have acted wickedly.

34 Our kings and leaders, our priests and our fathers did not keep your Law, they did not follow your commandments or the norms you gave them.

35 While they were in their kingdoms, enjoying the prosperity that came from you and the very fertile and wide land you had prepared for them, they did not serve you nor did they turn away from their wicked deeds.

36 See, we are now slaves, enslaved in the land you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruits and its goodness.

37 The abundant fruits of the land go to the kings you have set over us because of our sins. They do what they please with us and our livestock, and because of this we live in great distress.”

Promises made by the community

1 In accordance with all this, we make a firm commitment in writing. The document has been signed by our leaders, our Levites and our priests. 

2 Nehemiah son of Hacaliah son of Zede- kiah, 3 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 4 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 5 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 6 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 7 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 8 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 9 Maziazh, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these are the priests.

10 Then the Levites: Jeshua son of Az- niah, Binnui of the clan of Henadad, Kadmiel, 11 and their kinsmen Shebaniah, Hodaviah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 12 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 13 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 14 Hodiah, Bani, Chenani.


29 And the rest of the people, the priests and the Levites, the gatekeepers, singers and helpers and all who have separated themselves from the inhabitants of the land to follow the Law of God together with their wives and their children who are old enough to understand, all these 30 with their leaders and their brothers have sworn to walk according to the Law of God promulgated through Moses, the servant of God, and to keep and fulfill all the precepts of Yahweh, our God, and his decisions and laws.

31 We decided not to give our daughters in marriage to the men of the land nor take their daughters as wives for our sons. 32 If the people of the land bring goods or any food-stuff whatsoever to sell on the sabbath day, we will not buy anything from them on the sabbath day or on any other sacred feast day. We will leave our fields uncultivated in the seventh year, and cancel all debts owed to us.

33 We consider it our obligation to give one third of a shekel yearly for the service of the House of Yahweh, 34 for the show-bread, for perpetual food offering and the holocaust, for the sacrifices on the sabbath, on the new moon, on feasts for other sacrifices, for the expiation of the sin of Israel and for every-thing necessary in the House of God.

35 Among the priests, Levites and people of the town, we have drawn lots for the offering of firewood that each family shall bring by turn to the House of Yahweh every year to keep the fire burning at the altar of Yahweh, our God, as it is written in the Law.
36 We will bring the first fruits of our fields and of our fruit trees to the House of Yahweh through all the years. 37 Our firstborn sons and the firstborn of our animals, as it is written in the Law, the firstborn of our cattle and sheep will set aside for the House of Yahweh and for the priests who serve in the House of our God. 38 We will bring the best of our cereals, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil to the priests to be kept in the chambers of the House of our God; we will also bring the tithes from our fields for the Levites. The Levites themselves will collect the tithes from all the agricultural towns. 39 A priest, a son of Aaron, will go with them when they collect the tithes. The Levites will bring the tenth part of the tithes into the storage rooms of the House of God where the treasures are kept, 40 since the Israelites and the Levites bring to these storage rooms what they owe in wheat, wine and oil. In these rooms are also found the supplies for the Sanctuary, for the priests who are on duty, and for the gatekeepers and the singers.

So we will no longer neglect the House of our God.

11 1 The leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people drew lots so that for every ten men, one would live in Jerusalem, the Holy City, with the remaining nine settling in other cities. 2 The people blessed all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

3 These are the provincial leaders who resided in Jerusalem. And in the cities of Judah, everyone settled on his property, in the city of his family: the people of Israel and their priests and Levites, ministers and the sons of the servants of Solomon.

The Jewish population in Jerusalem

4 In Jerusalem there lived some of the tribe of Judah and some of the tribe of Benjamin.

Of the tribe of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziel, grandson of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Sephatiah, son of Mehalalel, of the descendants of Perez; 5 Maaseiah son of Baruch, grandson of Colhozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiyah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, descendant of Shelah. 6 The total number of the descendants of Perez living in Jerusalem was four hundred and sixty-eight adult men.

7 These belonged to the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu son of Meshullam, grandson of Joed, son of Pedaiyah, son of Kolaiyah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiah, 8 and his brothers Gabbai, Sallai: nine hundred twenty-eight.

9 Joel son of Zichri was their leader, and Judah son of Hassenuah was second in command of the city.

10 Of the priests: Jedaiah son of Joakin, son of Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, 11 grandson of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, who was the High Priest, 12 and his kinsmen who were responsible for the Temple liturgy: eight hundred and twenty-two; Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, 13 and his kinsmen, heads of families: two hundred and forty-two; and Amashai son of Azarel, grandson of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, 14 and his kinsmen, adult men: one hundred and twenty-eight.

Zabdiel son of Haggedolim was in charge of them.

15 Of the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, grandson of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni, 16 Shabbethai and Jozabad, the levitical leaders responsible for the outside work of the Temple of God; 17 Mattaniah son of Mica, grandson of Zabdi, son of Asaph, who directed the hymns and, at prayer, intoned the thanksgiving; Bakbukiah, the second in rank among his kinsmen; and Abda son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. 18 The total number of Levites in the holy city: two hundred and eighty-four.

19 The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and their kinsmen, who kept watch at the gates: one hundred and seventy-two.

21 The workmen lived at Ophel; Ziba and Gishepa were in charge of the workmen. 22 The head of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bani, grandson of Hashibiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, he belonged to the clan of Asaph who were responsible for the chanted parts of the liturgy in the Temple of God; 23 there were royal regulations stating how the clans should take turns in leading the Temple music each day. 24 Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, belonging to the clan of Zerah and the tribe of Judah, was the king’s commissioner for all such matters as concerned the people.

20 The rest of the Israelites, priests and Levites made their homes throughout the towns of Judah, each man in his own inheritance, 25 and in the villages situated in rural districts of their own fields.

Some of the tribe of Judah made their homes in Kiriathebra and its outlying villages, in Dibon and its outlying villages, in Jekabzeel and its outlying villages, 26 in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth-pelet, 27 Hazar-shual, in Beersheba and its villages, 28 in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, 29 in Enrimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, 30 Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. Thus, they settled from Beersheba as far as the Valley of Hinnom.

31 Some of the tribe of Benjamin made
their homes in Geba, Michmas, Aija, in Bethel and its villages. 32 Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod and Ono, and the Valley of the Craftsmen.

36 Some groups of Levites settled in Judah as well as in Benjamin.

12 These are the priests and the Levites who came back with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and with the High Priest Jeshua:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnetethoi, Abijai, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah; also: Joiarib, Jedaiah, Johanan, Amasa, Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam, of Amariah, son of Shechaniah, son of Mattaniah, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Shemaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, son of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethoni, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin...; of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; also: of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

21 In the days of the High Priests Eliashib, Joiada father of Johanan, and Johanan father of Jaddua.

22 In the days of Joiakim the High Priest the heads of the priestly clans were: clan of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; of Malluch, Jonathan; of Shecaniah, Joseph; of Harim, Adna; of Meroath, Helkai; of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin.; of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; also: of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

23 The sons of Levi.

24 The heads of the Levite families were recorded in the Book of the Chronicles, but only up to the time of Johanan, grandson of Eliashib.

The heads of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel; and their kinsmen forming an alternate choir for the hymns of praise and thanksgiving, in accordance with the instructions of David the man of God, in alternating groups.

25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers and stood guard at the storehouses near the gates.

26 These lived in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, grandson of Jozadak and in the days of Nehemiah, the governor and of Ezra, priest and scholar of the Law.

Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem

27 When the wall of Jerusalem was inaugurated, the Levites were summoned from all the places where they lived and they came to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with joy, with songs of thanksgiving, with the music of cymbals and zithers. 28 The singers from the neighboring regions and from the villages of Netophath, Beth-gilgal and the districts of Geba and Azmaveth gathered together in Jerusalem, because the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. 29 The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and then purified the people, the gates and the wall.

31 I then ordered the leaders of Judah to stand on top of the wall and I organized two grand choirs. The first advanced on top of the wall in the southern part, facing the Gate of the Garbage Dump; behind them went Hoshai and half the leaders of the Jews, and also Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamim, Shemaiah and Jeremiah, the priests and then the musicians with the trumpets came: Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, with his brothers, Shemaiah, Azareel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, Hanani, carrying the musical instruments of David, the man of God. Ezra, the teacher of the Law, went in front of them.

32 They went straight on up to the Fountain Gate, near the steps of the City of David, along the top of the wall of the house of David, as far as the Water Gate, on the east.

33 The second choir marched to the left: I followed it with half the leaders of the people along the top of the wall, passing through the Tower of the Furnaces and as far as the Wide Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, as far as the Sheep Gate, and we stopped at the Watch Gate.

40 Then the two choirs took their places in the House of God. Half of the counselors and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, who were carrying the trumpets, were at my side, together with Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam and Ezer. The singers chanted their songs under the direction of Jezrahiah.

43 Great sacrifices were offered that day and the people rejoiced, for God had bestowed great joy on them; the women and the children also participated in the feast. And the shouts of joy of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

44 At that time, supervisors were ap-
pointed to guard the storage rooms where the contributions, the firstfruits and the tithes were kept. They were to store in them the portions from the different cities of the territory required by the Law for the priests and Levites. For the people of Judah rejoiced to see the priests and Levites doing their duty.

They performed the liturgy of their God and the ceremonies of purification with the singers and the gatekeepers, as commanded by David and his son Solomon. For from the beginning, from the days of David and Asaph, there had been song leaders and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.

The whole of Israel, in the time of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, gave the singers and the gatekeepers what was necessary for each day. The sacred objects were entrusted to the Levites, and what was for the sons of Aaron was given to them.

At that time, the book of the Law of Moses was read in the presence of the people, and they found this written in it: “The Ammonite and Moabite will never enter the assembly of God, for they did not welcome the Israelites with bread and water. They gave money to Balaam to curse them, but our God turned their curse into a blessing.”

When they heard this Law, they excluded from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Second mission of Nehemiah

Before this, the priest Eliashib had been caretaker of the chambers of the House of God. Since he was related to Tobiah, he had allotted to him a spacious chamber which used to be the storage room for the offerings, incense, utensils, tithes of the wheat, wine and oil, that is, for what belonged to the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

I was not in Jerusalem when this happened, because in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had gone to see the king. Then after some time, the king allowed me to return. I returned to Jerusalem and I was informed of the evil Eliashib had done just to please Tobiah, allotting to him a chamber inside the court to the House of God. This made me very angry. So I threw all of Tobiah’s furniture out of the chamber and ordered the chamber to be purified, and had the utensils of the House of God, the offerings and the incense put back in place.

Nehemiah opposes several abuses

I also learned that the portions were not given to the Levites. And because of this, the Levites and the singers in charge of the ceremonies had gone back to their fields. I was angry with the counselors and said to them, “Why is the House of God abandoned?” Then I gathered together the Levites and the singers, and sent them back to work according to their respective duties.

With this, all the Jews turned over to the storehouses the tenth part of their wheat, wine and oil. I entrusted the administration of the storehouses to the priest Shelemiah, to the teacher of the Law Zadok, to the Levite Pedaiah, and to Hanan, son of Zaccur, as assistant. I appointed them since they were regarded as responsible men. Their work consisted in distributing the food to their brothers.

My God, remember the things I have done. Do not forget the good works I did for your House and its ceremonies.

In those days, I found men of Judah working in the winepress on the sabbath. Others took sheaves of wheat and loaded them on their asses together with wine, grapes, figs and every kind of produce they wanted to bring into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. I reprimanded them as they were selling their produce.

Some Tyrians who had settled in Jerusalem brought in fish and every sort of merchandise to sell to the Jews on the sabbath day. So I reprimanded the leaders of Judah, saying to them, “You have done great evil by not respecting the sabbath day.

When your ancestors did not observe the sabbath, our God brought all those misfortunes on us and on this city. You increase the wrath of God against Israel by not respecting his sabbaths.”

So I ordered that as the shadows were falling on the gates of Jerusalem in the evening before the sabbath, the gates were to be closed and not to be opened until after the sabbath was over. Moreover, I also stationed past, fanaticism for sacred places, and aggressive action against non-conformists. It is a fact that in the following centuries, the religious consciousness of the Jews developed more through contacts with the Greek culture than through their efforts at inner organization.

If we want to be faithful to the biblical message, Christian communities and the Church at large will have to seek growth by opening up to and facing the world.
some of my men by the gates so that no goods would be brought in on the sabbath day.

20 Once or twice, some merchants who sold every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem, but I warned them, saying, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? Do this again, and I shall use force against you." From then on, they did not return any more on the sabbath day. 21 I also ordered the Levites to purify themselves and to come and guard the gates in order to sanctify the sabbath. For this, too, remember me, my God, and have pity on me according to your great mercy.

22 I also reprimanded them and cursed them; I had some of them flogged and tore out their hair, and made them swear in the name of Yahweh, saying to them: "You shall not marry your daughters to the sons of those people, nor take any of their daughters as wife, neither you nor your sons. 26 Did Solomon, king of Israel, not sin in this? Among the many nations, there had not been a king like him. He was loved by God, and God made him king of all Israel. But foreign women also made him sin. 27 Will it also be said of you that you committed the same grave crime by rebelling against our God in marrying foreign women?"

28 I also sent away from my side one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of the high priest Eliashib, who was the son-in-law of Sanballat, the Horonite. 29 Remember this people, my God, for they defiled the priesthood and your covenant with the priests and Levites.

30 So I purified them from everything foreign. And I established regulations for the priests and the Levites, defining the tasks of everyone. 31 I also fixed the time for the wood offering and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, my God, for my good!