

27.04 Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:9–20; 3:1–32)

✓ “*Check*” it out. An opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[. . .] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud; they also show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- (Photos of gates were taken mainly from the following web site:
<http://www.gbcdecatur.org/sermons/SwingWideGates3#powerpoint>.)

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print on colorful cardstock and cut apart.

- *dung*: solid waste from animals and humans. Before modern plumbing and toilets, dung would be disposed of outside the city walls. The dung gate at Jerusalem was where this was taken. From there it could be taken into the fields to be used for fertilizer, a substance to help plants grow better.
- *reproach*: An object of contempt and disgrace so that people make fun of someone because of his/her shameful condition.
- *contempt*: Extreme hatred and disdain.

Scripture (ESV):

Nehemiah 2:9 Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River and gave them the king’s letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. 10 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard this, it displeased them greatly that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.

11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King’s Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

17 Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” 18 And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” 20 Then I replied to them, “The God of heaven will make us prosper, and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.”

3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel. 2 And next to him the men of Jericho built. And next to them Zaccur . . . built.

3 The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate. They laid its beams and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. 4 And next to them Meremoth . . . repaired. And next to them Meshullam . . . repaired. And next to them Zadok . . . repaired. 5 And next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.

6 Joiada . . . and Meshullam . . . repaired the Gate of Yeshanah. They laid its beams and set its doors, its

bolts, and its bars. 7 And next to them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, the seat of the governor of the province Beyond the River. 8 Next to them Uzziel . . . [and] goldsmiths, repaired. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, repaired, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Next to them Rephaiah . . . ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired. 10 Next to them Jedaiah . . . repaired opposite his house. And next to him Hattush . . . repaired. 11 Malchijah . . . and Hasshub . . . repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Next to him Shallum . . . ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired, he and his daughters.

13 Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate.

14 Malchijah . . . ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, repaired the Dung Gate. He rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

15 And Shallum . . . ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it and covered it and set its doors, its bolts, and its bars. And he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the city of David. 16 After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, ruler of half the district of Beth-zur, repaired to a point opposite the tombs of David, as far as the artificial pool, and as far as the house of the mighty men. 17 After him the Levites repaired: Rehum. . . . Next to him Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, repaired for his district. 18 After him their brothers repaired: Bavvai . . . ruler of half the district of Keilah. 19 Next to him Ezer . . . ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section opposite the ascent to the armory at the buttress. 20 After him Baruch . . . repaired another section from the buttress to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. 21 After him Meremoth . . . repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. 22 After him the priests, the men of the surrounding area, repaired. 23 After them Benjamin and Hasshub repaired opposite their house[s]. After them Azariah . . . repaired beside his own house. 24 After him Binnui . . . repaired another section, from the house of Azariah to the buttress and to the corner. 25 Palal . . . repaired opposite the buttress and the tower projecting from the upper house of the king at the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah . . . 26 and the temple servants living on Ophel repaired to a point opposite the Water Gate on the east and the projecting tower. 27 After him the Tekoites repaired another section opposite the great projecting tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

28 Above the Horse Gate the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house. 29 After them Zadok . . . repaired opposite his own house. After him Shemaiah . . . the keeper of the East Gate, repaired. 30 After him Hananiah . . . and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After him Meshullam . . . repaired opposite his chamber. 31 After him Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired as far as the house of the temple servants and of the merchants, opposite the Muster Gate, and to the upper chamber of the corner. 32 And between the upper chamber of the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and the merchants repaired.

Introduction/Review:

Nehemiah, the cupbearer to Artaxerxes, heard about the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. After praying for three months about the situation, the Lord gave Nehemiah opportunity to request of the king that he be allowed to go back to Jerusalem to build the walls and fix the gates to the city. The king gave Nehemiah letters to permit Nehemiah to go through the various territories on his journey and to get timber from the king's forest.

Story:

In contrast to Ezra, who had fasted and prayed for a safe journey without asking protection from Artaxerxes, Nehemiah asked for letters to pass through the lands. However, Artaxerxes, knowing the dangers of this journey, also sent captains of the army and horsemen with Nehemiah. ✓Those captains and horsemen with the king's insignia probably impressed the governors of the land. ✓Perhaps Nehemiah caused quite a stir as he rode into Jerusalem.

Checking things out

Like Ezra, Nehemiah rested three days before doing any work. But on that third night, without announcing what he was doing, he and his horse (or donkey) and a few men went outside the city to look at the broken-down walls. [Teacher, use the maps of Jerusalem below to show where Nehemiah went, beginning with the southwest “[Vincent’s] Valley Gate” and moving counter-clockwise.] He went out the gate of the valley and went all the way to the dung gate.

As he rode, he probably thought, ✓“Look at the piles of broken stone blocks and the burned gates. Oh, what a mess! Here we are at the fountain gate. I want to get to Solomon’s pool, but there is no room for my animal to walk because of the debris and rocks. What a sad state of affairs! Before turning back, I’ll just ride over to the bank of the Brook Kidron and check over all the walls from that point.”

After surveying the walls from Kidron, he said, “That’s enough for tonight. I’m going back to the valley gate and go home.”

Meeting with leaders

The next morning, Nehemiah met with the city rulers. “You can see the trouble we are in,” he said, “how the city is useless without its walls and the burned-up gates. Come. Let’s build up the wall of Jerusalem so that our enemies will stop making fun of us in our desolate condition. Look. I have letters from Artaxerxes to get timber from his forest. We have his approval to build the walls and the gates. What do you say?”

What would you have said? After all, Jews returning from exile had lived here for more than eighty years with the city in this condition. Building walls would be hard work. Enemies might taunt them even more than usual. They might even try to attack. Wouldn’t it be better just to leave things as they were?

No. That’s not what the rulers thought. They answered, “Let us rise up and build!” And instead of worrying about what would happen and about the hard work, they encouraged each other to be determined to build with cheerfulness. Yippee! We will build the city wall!

Having two enemies

But not everyone in the area was so excited. Those enemies we’ve mentioned were not excited about the proposed building project. Two enemies in particular come to our attention several times in the book of Nehemiah. They are Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, an Ammonite.

Let me tell you about these two men. Sanballat came from Moab [locate] and ✓might have been its governor. Tobiah ✓might have been a slave previously but now was probably the governor of Ammon. The original men named Moab and Ammon were sons of Lot, nephews of Abraham. Even though they were distant relatives, Moab and Ammon had been warring against Israel since the time of the judges. In fact, when Israel had come from Egypt into the Promised Land, Moab and Ammon had not let the Israelites, their cousins, pass through their territory. Indeed, long-standing national animosity against the Jews fueled the contempt of Sanballat and Tobiah.

Nehemiah 2:10 tells us these two men “grieved exceedingly”—they were greatly distressed and disturbed—that a man, Nehemiah, had come to help the Jews. Now that they knew about the building plans, they started a contempt campaign.

“Ha, ha! What are you doing? Are you rebelling against King Artaxerxes?”

Nehemiah answered, “The God of heaven will prosper us; therefore, we, His servants, will arise and build. You, however, have no authority in Jerusalem. In fact, none of your ancestors had anything to do with Jerusalem. You have no right to tell us what to do.”

We will see later that Nehemiah’s rebuke did little to discourage these enemies. They were intent on stopping the progress in Jerusalem.

Building the wall

But the men of Jerusalem were not to be stopped. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah lists forty-one different sets of

people, each in his own place, who worked all around the whole wall. Listen to the everyday occupations of some of these men: priests, including the high priest (priests repaired at least three places of the wall); goldsmiths; pharmacists (or confectioners); several rulers of other cities (however, the nobles of Tekoa “did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord”); Levites; a gatekeeper; merchants; and Nethinim. Some women also worked with their fathers or hired someone to do their share. Many men repaired walls that were close to their homes. This makes us think whole families helped build the wall

Repairing the gates

Ten burned and broken gates also needed repair. These gates led to interesting places inside and outside Jerusalem. [✓Teacher, opinions differ on the location and use of these ancient gates. In addition, some of my photos of supposedly different gates appear to be the same gate with slight differences. Use a map at the end of this lesson as you point out these gates.]

1. Sheep Gate: Through this gate the sheep were led to the nearby Temple. Close to this gate was the sheep market, where sheep were sold, and the sheep pool, where the sacrifices were washed. Since this gate was near the Temple and for the service of it, the priests repaired here. This is the only gate that was sanctified—dedicated to God.
2. Fish Gate: Fish were brought through this gate, and a fish market was close to it.
3. Old Gate: We don’t know for sure why it was called “old,” but some think it led to the old city of Salem, where Melchizedek was king during Abraham’s lifetime.
4. Valley Gate: This seems to have led to the Valley of Hinnom. From this gate to the Dung Gate was about 4–5 blocks. That is a long piece to repair; only one group of people repaired this whole section.
5. Dung Gate: You guessed it. This is where the trash and dung (poop) was taken out of the city. One source states the prevailing winds at this place blew the stench away from the city. The valley near it was called the Valley of Hinnom, where, formerly, Israelites had sacrificed to the abominations—the false gods. Dead bodies could be found in Hinnom during Jeremiah’s time. Fires burned in it constantly, so the Valley of Hinnom is a picture of Hell.
6. Fountain Gate: This gate, like none of the others, got a covering, probably because of the fountain near it.
7. Water Gate: The Nethinim lived near here. Remember, these were servants to the Levites. They did menial work for the Temple, like chopping wood and taking out ashes. Part of their everyday job was to fetch water for Temple use; so this was an appropriate gate and section of the wall for them to repair.
8. Horse Gate: Either horse stables were near it, or horses were led through it outside the city to drink in the Brook Kidron.
9. East Gate: This was very close to the Temple. Ezekiel had prophesied that it would be closed until Messiah, Jesus Christ, would open it at His second coming.
10. Miphkad (Inspection) Gate: Some scholars think this was near to the building where the judges heard cases and made decisions.

What a job these many Jews had! Would they get the work done? How much would their enemies discourage them? We will learn more in our next lesson.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
“In Nehemiah, we encounter a leader who, akin to Christ, embodies qualities of compassion, courage,

and unwavering faith. Nehemiah's unceasing efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and revive the city resonate with Christ's mission to rebuild and redeem humanity” ([Nehemiah: Revealing Christ's Character and Mission — Equipped Servant](#)).

- When there is work to be done for the Lord, put your shoulders to the work.
- Some people spiritualize the gates, using them to show steps in the Christian experience. Here is a typical application:

Sheep Gate: Christ, the Lamb of God, saves us from our sins.

Fish Gate: After we have been saved, we want to tell everybody about Jesus Christ (fishers of men).

Old Gate: The “old man” needs to die.

Valley Gate: We go through times of discouragement.

Dung Gate: Confession and cleansing from sin are pictured here.

Fountain Gate: Our Source of living water is the Holy Spirit.

Water Gate: The Word of God affects our lives.

Horse Gate: We are in spiritual warfare.

East Gate: The Messiah will return through this gate.

Miphkad (Inspection) Gate: We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Activities:

- Play dough: building blocks for making the walls
- Snack: This lesson lends itself to a food craft/snack—building with marshmallows, sugar wafers, or graham crackers and using frosting as mortar; crackers might be “mortared” with peanut butter or spreadable cheese.
- Beginning at 4 minutes and 42 seconds, finish watching the first Nehemiah video found at [Bible Stories for the Young : Stories](#). Scroll down about 3/5 of the page. Nehemiah’s story will be in the center column next to Ezra’s story.
- Ask what the children could have done to help build the wall. Some answers might be to fetch tools and water; bring lunch; rub their father’s sore back and shoulders;
- Build a wall of boxes or toy blocks (wooden blocks, Legos, etc.). Show how a wall is made sturdy—by overlapping bricks.
- Review questions: (Game: Get 6 plastic cups. The first three students who answer a question correctly may each place a cup on a table. The fourth and fifth students to answer a question correctly will place their cups on top of two cups of the first layer. The sixth student will place his/her cup on the fourth and fifth cups.)
 1. Contrast (tell the difference between) Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s approach to the king. [Ezra did not ask for protection for his trip to Judah; Nehemiah did ask for help.]
 2. What did Nehemiah do the third night he was in Jerusalem? [Went out to check the walls and gates.]
 3. Fill in the blanks. After Nehemiah met with the leaders, they said, “Let us rise up and _____.” [Build.]
 4. Two enemies were not happy about the plans to rebuild. Name one of them. Hint: One’s name begins with the letter *S*, and the other’s name begins with the letter *T*. [Sanballat or Tobiah.]
 5. People of all occupations helped build the wall. Name one of those occupations. [priests; goldsmiths; pharmacists (confectioners); rulers of other cities; Levites; a gatekeeper; merchants; Nethinim; women.]
 6. Give the name of one of the ten gates. [Sheep Gate; Fish Gate; Old Gate; Valley Gate; Dung Gate; Fountain Gate; Water Gate; Horse Gate; East Gate; Miphkad (Inspection) Gate.]

Memory Verse[s]:

Review Psalm 1:1–3.

Review definitions: *Blessed* is the condition of joy that is free from evil. *Counsel* is advice. The three words—*wicked*, *sinner*s, and *scoffers*—all describe someone in rebellion against God and His ways. The *law of the Lord* is the Bible, the Word of God. To *meditate* is to think with deep study.

- **1** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

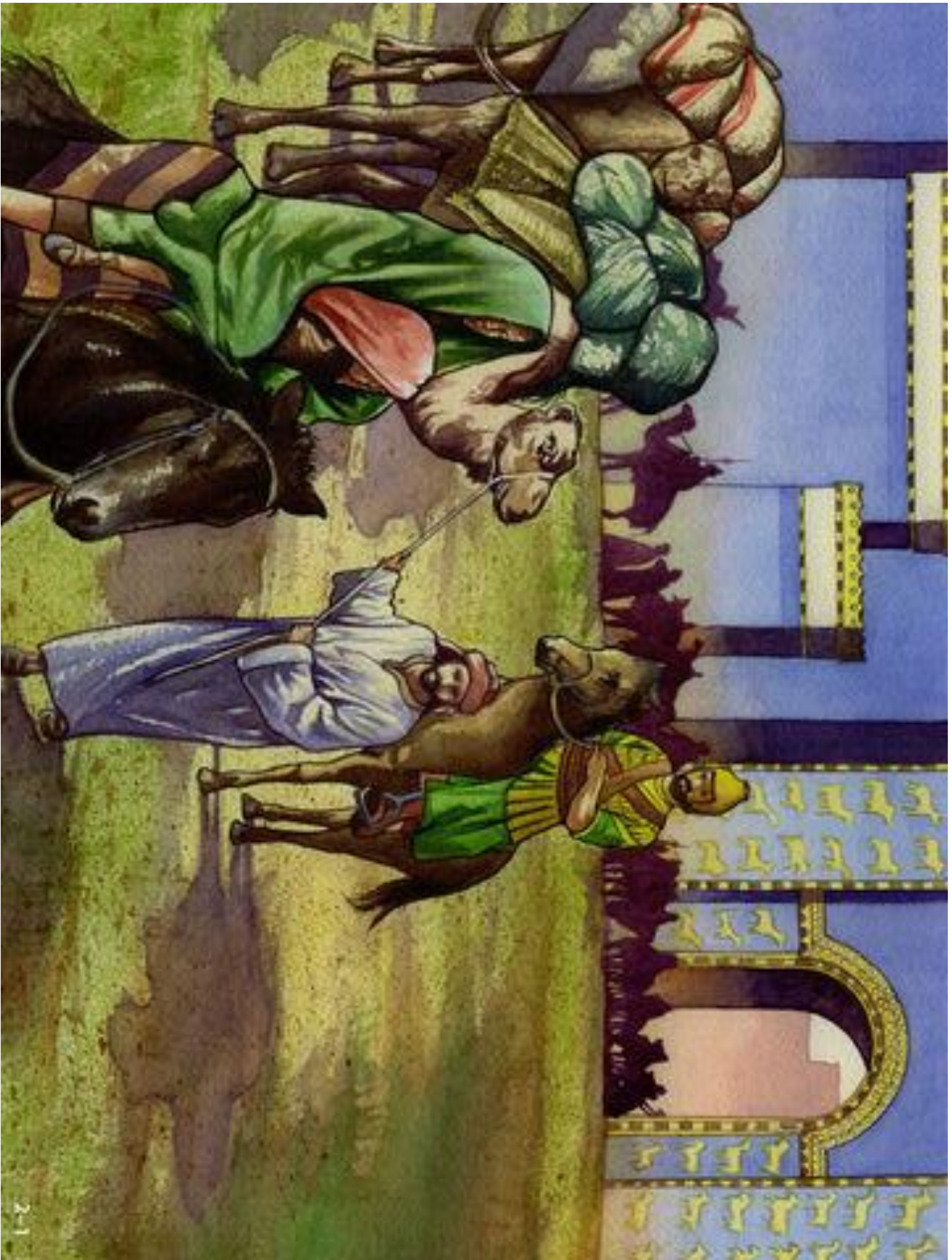
Handwork:

- Color the picture copied below which can be found at <http://cciog.com/cckids/files/2010/09/Nehemiah-Coloring-Sheet.pdf>

dung

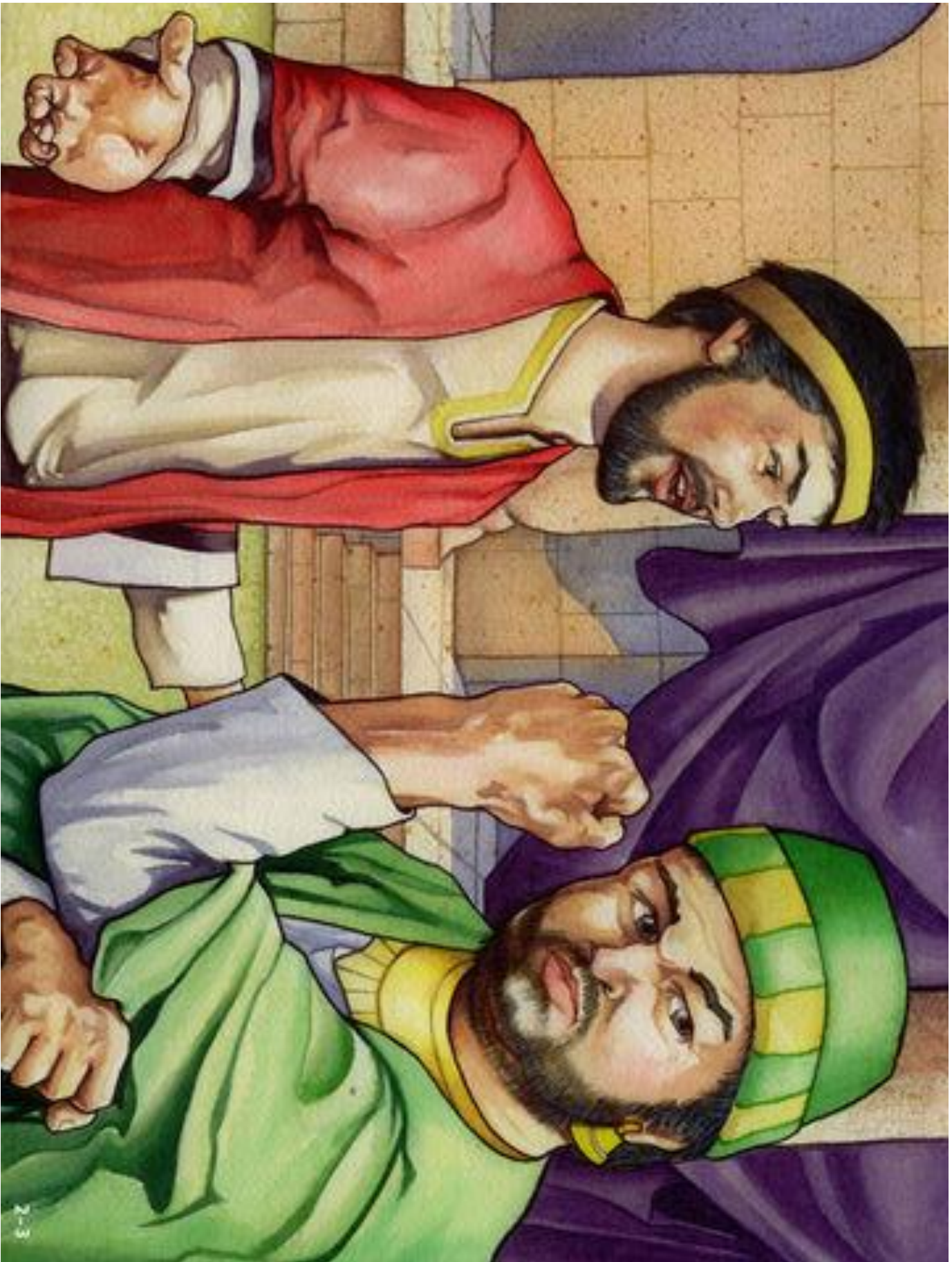
reproach

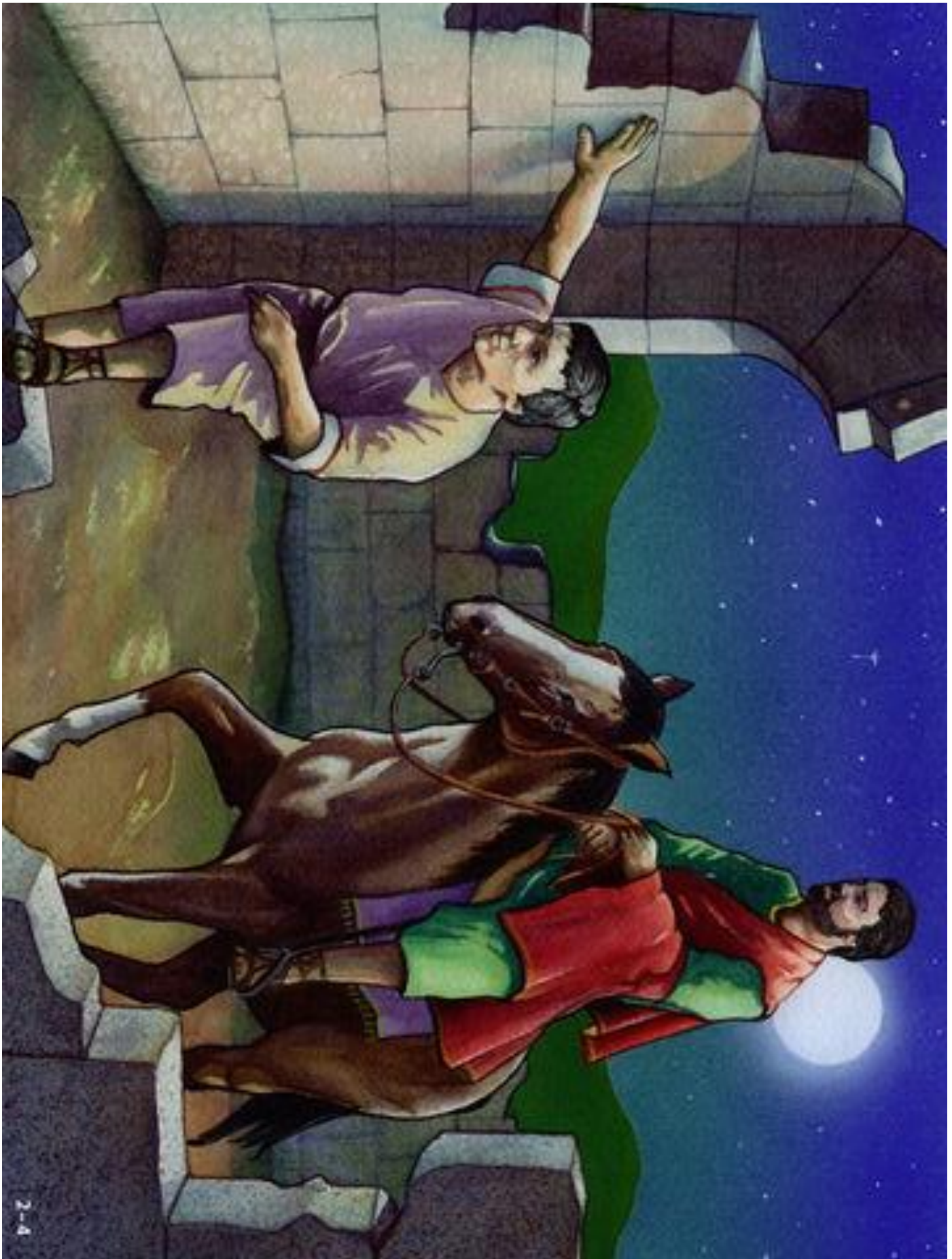
contempt

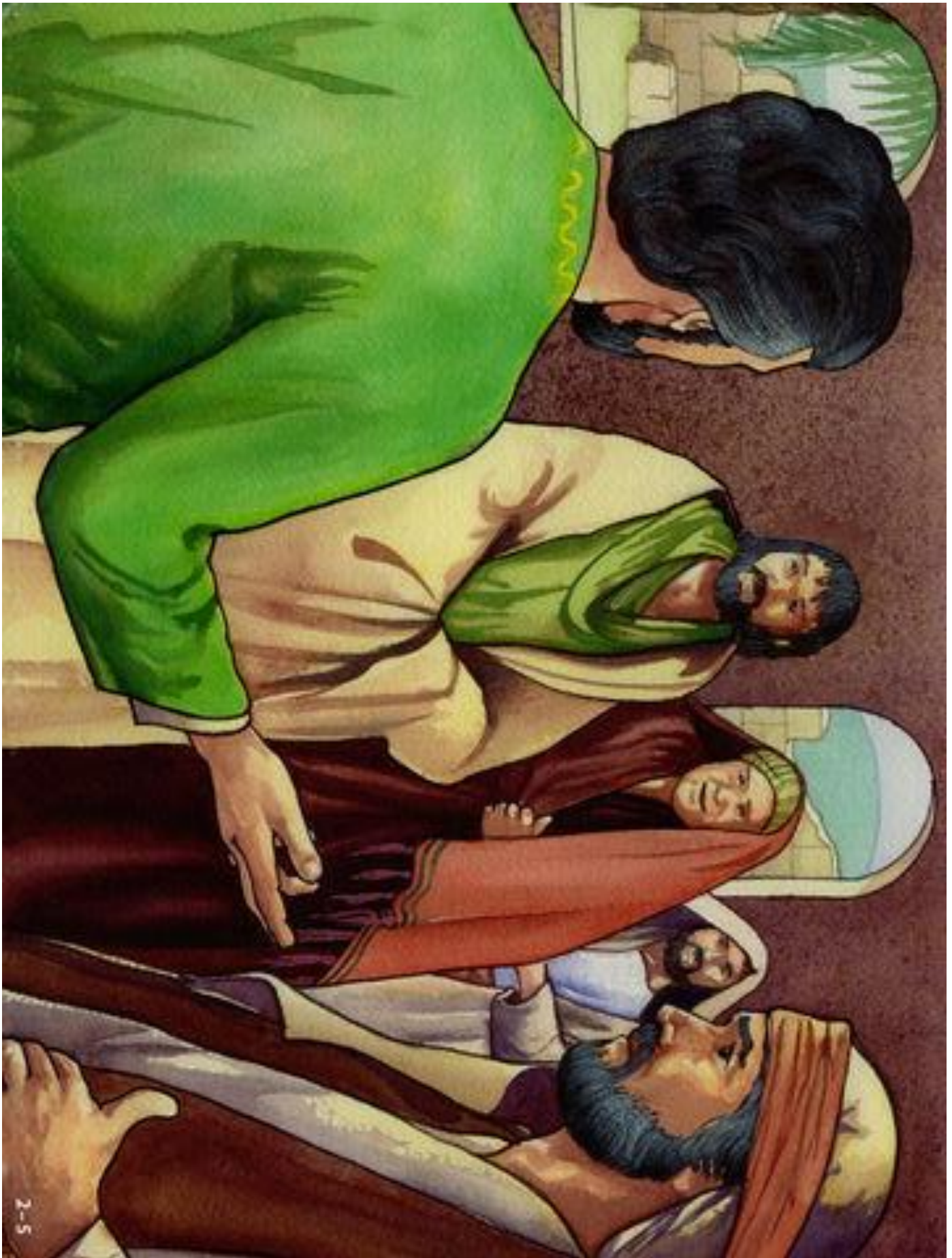




Map by Biblical Archaeology Society











Sheep Gate



Fish Gate



Old Gate (Jaffa Gate)



Valley Gate



Dung Gate



New Dung Gate



Fountain Gate



Water Gate



Horse Gate

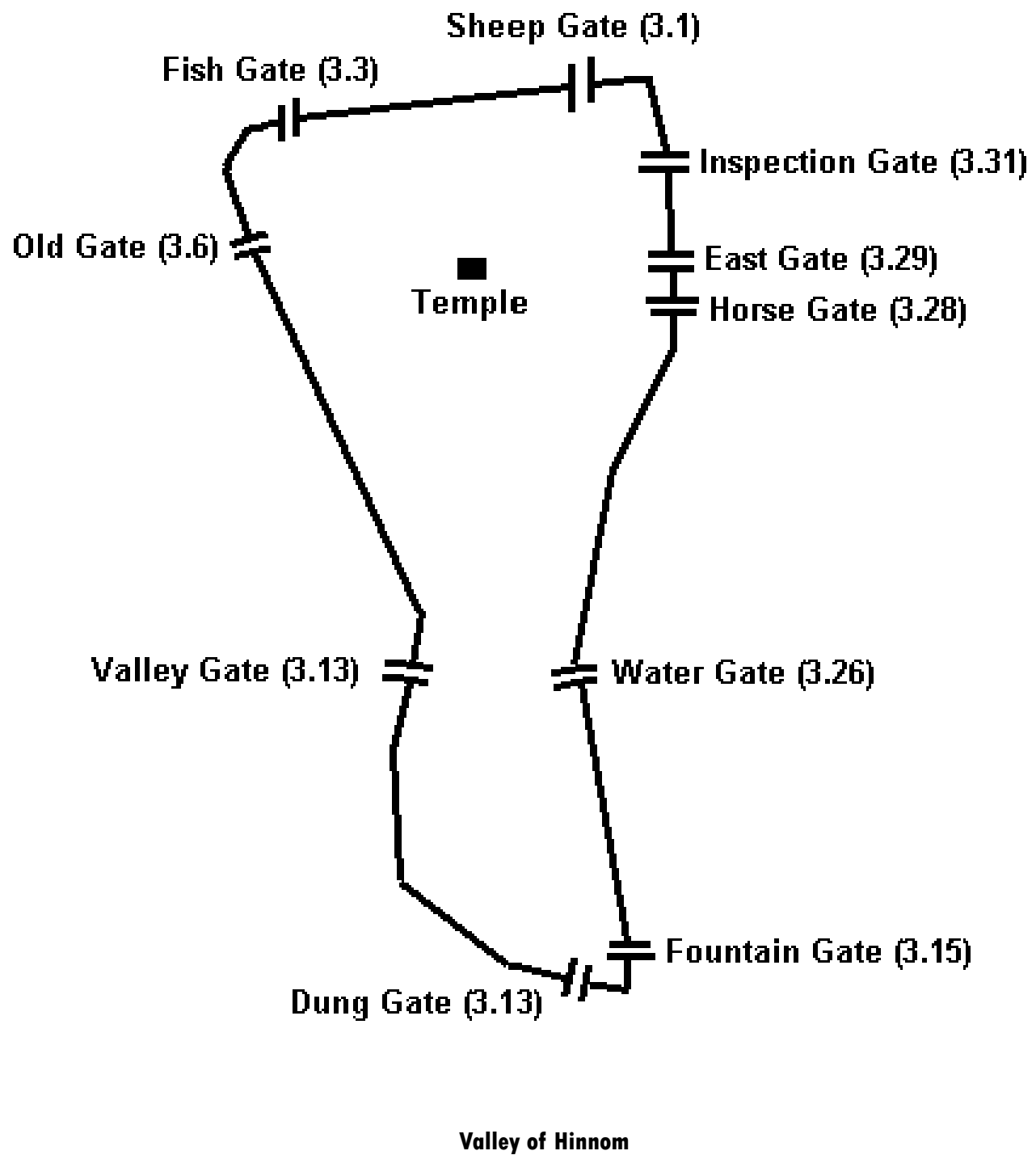


East Gate



Inspection Gate (Miphkad)

Nehemiah's Jerusalem





“So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.”

Nehemiah 4:6

