

## THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

There are Christians who advocate that the keeping of God's Sabbath only needs to occur during hours of sunlight. One of the arguments posed by such Christians are that the gates of Jerusalem were huge, massive gates that would require several men to close them and involved considerable physical exertion (ie. work). Nehemiah, who is believed to have observed the Sabbath, had allegedly instructed gate keepers to shut the main gates when it was already dark on the Sabbath (ie. Friday evening). Verses used to support their position are from Nehemiah 13:15 to 19 which states:

***“In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.”***

First, we should clarify the matter of the closing of the gates. If the gates of Jerusalem involved 'considerable effort' to close, does that imply the length of time that would be needed to accomplish that task? The reader should be aware that men were allotted as gate keepers at each specific gate and that the city of Jerusalem had many gates: the sheep gate, the fountain gate, the dung gate, the water gate and others. There were numerous gates and they were massive. Did it take the gate keepers considerable time to close the gates, and if so, how long did it take: 30 minutes, 45 minutes or an hour? The Bible tells us that there would have been gate keepers stationed at each separate gate: ***“...After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate.”*** Nehemiah 3:29a; ***“Moreover, the porters, Akkub, Talman, and their brethren that kept the gates were an hundred and seventy and two.”*** Nehemiah 11:19; ***“Among these were the divisions of the porters, even among the chief men, having wards one against another, to minister in the house of the LORD. And they cast lots, as well the small as the great, according to the house of their fathers, for every gate.”*** I Chronicles 26:12, 13. We should be aware that every keeper of a gate had helpers assisting them. As a result, there would be no great amount of time involved to perform the task of closing the individual gates. From what we know from history, gates would need to be designed to close relatively quickly given they often formed part of the fortification of cities to protect from attacks from enemies outside city walls. In other words, if gates took 30 minutes or more to close, that would be a significant risk to a city's inhabitants since, if it took that long to close gates, an enemy attack could then easily breach a city's walls and overwhelm its population in no time. For further consideration, most cities of old had gates that were hinged which lessened the effort required by gate keepers to close them. For these reasons, the suggestion that city gates took considerable time to close does not make sense. We agree that the gates were massive, however, between the gatekeepers, their helpers and gate hinges, they would not take considerable time to close as some may suggest.

Another aspect to consider in our discussion is it is suggested that the initial verses quoted from Nehemiah means the city gates were already dark when the gate keepers were asked to close them. If that was true, Nehemiah, who we know observed the Sabbath, was telling the gate keepers to close the gates when it was already dark (ie. Friday after sunset, which Jews consider to be part of the Sabbath). The argument, thus, is if Nehemiah who kept God's Sabbath was telling the gate keepers to close the gates when it was already dark on Friday evening, then that means we can work during the dark portion of the Sabbath day. In considering this argument, we need to understand whether the original writing translated as 'dark' means what is being suggested by those believing in observing the Sabbath during daylight hours only. We refer the reader to "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance" and search under the word 'dark'. You should notice something peculiar about the word 'dark' used in Nehemiah 13:19. The 'dark' for this verse refers you to code 6751. None of the other 'dark' references has this code number. Now look up code 6751 in the Hebrew and Chaldee dictionary in the concordance, and you should see the following remarks: "*A prim-root (rather ident. with 6749, through the idea of hovering over (comp. 6754): to shade, as twilight or an opaque object: - begin to be dark, shadowing, 6754 from an unused root mean. to shade, a phantom.*" The original writing translated as 'dark' in this verse from Nehemiah tells us that the gates were closed by sunset and not during total darkness. 'Shadowing' suggests presence of light and it clearly states 'begin to be dark', that is, sunset or twilight.

From the initial verses cited at the start of this tract, the time had come that Nehemiah no longer tolerated the breaking of the Sabbath, therefore, he had the Levites (his servants) placed at the gates of Jerusalem before the start of the Sabbath. Nehemiah commanded the gates to be closed within the time of the approaching twilight that was hovering over (or drawing near). Night had definitely not arrived before the closing of the gates because of the original words translated to 'dark' meaning the twilight that was hovering over. The text clearly points out that the sabbath starts at evening (at darkness, at the first sightings of the stars, after twilight) at the setting of the sun. ***"And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates. That there should be no burden be brought in on the sabbath."***

It should be noted that worshippers from the areas outside of Jerusalem or any other city would no doubt be allowed to enter and exit through the gate door for the purpose of worshipping in the temple court or the synagogue on the Sabbath. There would be no need for servants to be stationed at the main gates as keepers during the Sabbath, if both the main gates and gate doors were permanently closed to worshippers and sellers alike. The main gates were closed so that no burden should be brought into the city on the Sabbath, although certainly not for the purpose of keeping the Jews from worshipping at the temple or synagogues. Most main gates had small doors built in them while others were built beside the main gates so that people could move in and out without needing to open the main gates. These smaller doors were made so that only one person could pass through at a time.

In conclusion, Nehemiah had not asked the gate keepers to close the main gates of Jerusalem when it was already dark on Friday. The verses from Nehemiah, when we understand what 'dark' meant in its proper context, tell us that darkness was approaching given the shadowing on the gates due to the arrival of twilight, but it was not dark when the gate keepers were closing the main gates of

Jerusalem. Observing the Sabbath only during daylight hours cannot be justified from the forementioned passages from the book of Nehemiah.