

## Overview of Nehemiah

### Theme:

The Book of Nehemiah is the story of the third return of the Jews from exile in Babylon in 444 B.C. and is named for its principal character. It is the sequel to the Book of Ezra and by this time, Ezra had been in Jerusalem for thirteen years. As with Ezra, Nehemiah was also given permission by Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city and to reorder the people's social and economic lives. He was appointed governor of the province of Judah with authority to rebuild the city walls. By this time the temple of Zerubbabel was completed. Later Nehemiah left Jerusalem to return to king Artaxerxes (13:4-9). He then returned to Jerusalem to find that the sin of mixed marriages had occurred again as during Ezra's time.

While Ezra accomplished the spiritual establishment of the new community, Nehemiah succeeded in giving it physical stability. Thus God encircled His people with protection by the walls which Nehemiah rebuilt and by the law that Ezra reestablished. The book continues the theme of worship, which is extensive in Chronicles and Ezra.

### Authorship

Most Bible scholars agree that Nehemiah wrote the book that bears his name. Much of the book is a first-person account of the circumstances surrounding his return to Jerusalem. However, some believe that Ezra wrote both Nehemiah and Ezra. This is based on the fact that both books were originally one. It is possible that both men wrote the Book of Nehemiah.

### Key Verses:

- 1:1-11 — Nehemiah's prayer for Jerusalem.
- 1:4 — and it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and **fasted, and prayed** before the God of heaven,
- 1:11 — O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.
  - Note that he identified himself as the king's cupbearer last in this chapter, after presenting his request to the king and praying.
- 5:19 — Think upon me, my God, for good, *according*, to all that I have done for this people.
- 6:15-16 — So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth *day of the month* Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all that heard them that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.
- 8:1 — And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street (plaza) that *was* before the winter gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

## Overview of Nehemiah

### Broad Outline for Nehemiah

- I. The Return of Nehemiah 1:1 — 2:20
  - A. Nehemiah learns of conditions in Jerusalem 1:1-3
  - B. Nehemiah's prayer for Jerusalem 1:4-11
  - C. Nehemiah's preparations for the wall (chap 2)
- II. The Building of the Wall 3:1 — 7:73
  - A. The builders of the wall (chap 3)
  - B. Opposition to the builders 4:1-3
  - C. The problem of debt (chap 5)
  - D. More opposition and the wall completed (chap 6)
  - E. Protecting Jerusalem 7:1-73
- III. The Reading of the Law 8:1 — 13:31
  - A. Ezra reads the Law (chap 8)
  - B. Israel confesses its sin (chap 9)
  - C. The signing of the Covenant (chap 10)
  - D. Lists of exiles returned 11:1-12:26
  - E. Dedication of the walls 12:27-47
  - F. Nehemiah's reforms (chap 13)

### Food for Thought in Nehemiah

When Nehemiah first arrived in Jerusalem about 444 B.C., many old-time enemies of the Jews had taken possession of the land. The Moabites, Ammonites, Ashdodites, Arabians, and Samaritans bitterly opposed the rebuilding of the Wall of Jerusalem.

After the Wall was built, Nehemiah and Ezra gathered the people together to reorganize their life. For seven days, every day from early morning till midday, Ezra and his helpers, opened the Book of the Law, and read the Law of God, so that the people understood the reading.

Next consider the many oppositions that Nehemiah faced: mockery (2:19; 4:1-3); armed raids (4:7-12); a plot to draw him outside the city, without doubt to murder him (6:1-4); blackmail (6:5-9); and finally a prophet to foretell his death (6:10).

Note that while Nehemiah had returned to Shushan to report to Artaxerxes, that the sin of mixed marriages had occurred again (13:23-28), and the children of these marriages could not speak Hebrew. Recall that this sin existed in the book of Ezra (9:1-15).

### Questions:

1. What leadership principles does Nehemiah's success in building Jerusalem's walls provide for us today?

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2. What can we learn from Nehemiah's prayer (chap 1)?
  
3. Describe several traits of Nehemiah in which he was consistent.
  - i). His concern for the Lord's glory and the welfare of the Lord's people
  - ii). In prayer and action
  - iii). In service both to the Lord and in relationships with others
  - iv).
  
4. When we find Christians falling into apostasy, what should we do? Note that Nehemiah "contended with them, and cursed them, and smote (hit) certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, *saying*, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Should we do the same as Nehemiah? Of course not.
  
5. Do you think that Christians are needed in leadership positions not only within the church but also in civil government? Why or why not?

### References:

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