

NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION

1. AUTHOR – The book claims in 1:1 to be by Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah. Its final form may have been by Ezra since the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book.
2. DATE WRITTEN – About 440-430 BC, some time after the exile. It is one of latest OT books.
3. DATES COVERED – The book only deals with a short period of time, around 445 BC.
4. NAME – The book takes its name from the key character and traditional author Nehemiah. His name means "the Lord comforts."
5. KEY VERSES – 1:3, 2:18, 6:15-16, 10:29, and 12:27.

OUTLINE

Nehemiah led the return of a group of the exiles to Jerusalem in order to organize them to rebuild the walls of the city and carry out some reforms.

1. NEHEMIAH RETURNED TO JERUSALEM TO HELP REBUILD THE CITY WALLS. CH 1-6
 - A. Nehemiah was called and returned to Jerusalem. Ch 1:1-2:10
 - B. Nehemiah inspected the wall and organized the workers. Ch 2:11-3:32
 - C. He dealt with opposition from opponents, Ch 4, and internal hindrances. Ch 5
 - D. The wall was completed in 52 days. Ch 6
2. NEHEMIAH AND EZRA WORKED TO IMPROVE JUDAH'S SPIRITUAL LIFE. CH 7-13
 - A. Zerubbabel took a census of the exiles who returned. Ch 7. See Ezra 2
 - B. Ezra read the law. Israel responded to it with a new covenant. Ch 8-10
 - C. The people were registered and jobs assigned. Ch 11:1-12:26
 - D. The wall was dedicated. Ch 12:27-47
 - E. Nehemiah instituted several more reforms. Ch 13

IMPORTANCE OF NEHEMIAH

1. Nehemiah is an excellent example of God's call on a person's life. He had a burden, prayed about it, and God sent him to answer his own prayer.
2. Great things are accomplished when the political leader, Nehemiah, worked with the spiritual leader, Ezra. Pray for our political leaders.
3. There is a great example of how organization helps God's people accomplish God's task as each one built/repared the wall in his own place. That is the way the spiritual gifts are supposed to work within the Body of Christ. See 1 Corinthians 12-14.
4. The balance of God and man working together is illustrated. See 2:4-8, 4:4-6,9, and 6:16.
5. Nehemiah is a spiritual diary of a man of God doing his job. It is filled with Nehemiah in his work but is interspersed with his frequent prayers for God's help in his job. That is the way all of us should be in our jobs, whatever they are.
6. Chapter 8:8 gives a good standard for all teaching and preaching of God's Word. It says that they read from the Word of God and then made it clear for the people to understand and obey.
7. Spiritual renewal goes together with accomplishing God's work. Our spiritual commitment is seen to affect the jobs we do each day.

NEHEMIAH

1 – Nehemiah is a personal book. When news about the state of Jerusalem, his home city reached him, Nehemiah grieved, mourned, fasted and prayed. His prayer is a model prayer of confession of sin, both corporately and individually. See also prayers of Daniel and Ezra. V6-7 "Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes and the rules, that you commanded your servant Moses." Nehemiah's prayer request was specific enough to accomplish his purpose but general enough to allow God to work it out in his way.

The point of this prayer was to prepare to approach the king to request help for his home city. The basis of his appeal to God was the promise of God that even though they had disobeyed God's commands for generations, God had promised that whenever they returned to God, repented, he would let them return to their own land and city. Nehemiah counts on God's faithfulness to his word and acts on it.

2 – The king, Artaxerxes, (wasn't he the one with Esther also?) not only granted Nehemiah permission to return to do the work he felt called to do in Jerusalem, he also granted him whatever resources for which he asked. V8 "And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me." Unlike Ezra's method, the king also sent soldiers and guards to accompany them on their trip to Jerusalem. When Nehemiah arrived there, he did an inspection of the wall of the city so that when he stood before the people, he was prepared. They found his call persuasive and agreed to work with him to rebuild the wall. The people responded to Nehemiah's proposal by saying, V18, "Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work." There was opposition.

3 – This chapter is a classic example of how to achieve a very large project. It does not say that Nehemiah did all the organizing and administration of this project but someone did. Each person was responsible for a certain section of the wall to repair it. Many of them were responsible to work on the section that was nearest their own homes. V28 "Above the Horse Gate, the priests repaired, each one opposite his own house." It is probably not significant but halfway through the chapter the term changes from "next to them/him" to "after him/them." Another key idea is represented by the phrase "opposite his own house." Obviously one building near his own house will do good work.

4 – The opposition to the work of God's people mounts. The key issue is stated in V2. "And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?'" Nehemiah led the people to turn immediately to God with their plea. The opposition sought to intimidate and separate. Nehemiah turned to the Lord who is greater and he armed the people as they worked. V14 "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your homes." Sometimes half the people worked while the other half stood guard and sometimes those who worked also carried their swords with them as well as their trowels. They were all on the alert at all times. They did the work of the Lord that they were supposed to do and were not able to be distracted. At the same time they were practical with swords and weapons. All was covered with prayer. The key issue to the author seems to be the wisdom God granted Nehemiah to deal with each situation of danger as it arose and at the same time to complete the work God called him to do in building the wall.

5 – When it came to Nehemiah's attention that there was wrongdoing among the people, he addressed it immediately and they remedied it by obedience. When Nehemiah found that leaders were overtaxing the people and charging interest, he demanded they stop. He himself did not charge any taxes but supported himself and his officials in all his work, including feeding the foreign visitors who came to his table. All he

asks back is that the Lord would V19 "Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people."

6 – More threats against Nehemiah were made but the Lord granted him godly wisdom to not fall for those threats and to continue the work to which God had called him. Nowhere is God mentioned as active in the building of the wall though the people were very dependent on him and express that many times. At the same time, when they completed the wall, they announced that their enemies knew that they had been able to complete it V16 "for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God." The enemies continued to seek to threaten but Nehemiah only committed them to the Lord and did his work that he knew he was called to do. V12 "And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him."

How dependent on God we are! Even a false prophet could not fool Nehemiah because he knew the work he was to do was from God. How certain are we of God's work for us, enough that we are not distracted?

7 – Every issue was faced and tackled head on immediately. There were not enough people living in the city of Jerusalem so they recruited some. The names of these people are listed. What a great memorial to them 2500 years later. We are not sure what the purpose was for all these names. It was part of God's plan that they are listed but the reason is not made clear. V5 "Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy."

8 – This is one of the best-known passages in Nehemiah where after the wall was built there was a large assembly of the people. The highlight of the assembly was Ezra reading the law in such a way that all the people were able to understand what it said and meant. V8 "They read from the book, from the law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." When the people heard the word of the Lord, they responded with grief and weeping. They were told that this was such a special day that it was to be only one of celebration. There was a great feast and everyone shared food with those who had none. V12 "And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them."

9 – The assembly continued. There was a long prayer of confession of sin. The point of confession is less to make a list than it is to admit that we are wrong and God is right. This is another model prayer from which we can learn the way to pray. It is good for us to identify with the sins of previous generations. Out of this time came an agreement among the people and the leaders in which they agreed not to marry foreigners, nor buy, sell or work on the Sabbath, to give the proper offering for the support of all that went on at the temple, to serve in the temple according to position, and to bring in the firstfruits. The key element in this is the grace and mercy of God. The prayer contained many references to the sins of the nation of Israel ever since the beginning. Yet each time, God was merciful. The application is that now in their latest disobedience they were fully willing to confess. They appealed to God to be merciful once again. For example, see V33. "Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly."

10 – Notice the oath that the people take and all the commands of Moses that were a part of the service of the house of God that they commit themselves to carry out. V29 "...and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God and his rules and his statutes." V39 "We will not neglect the house of our God." On the other hand, since they carried out this commitment for only a short time it reminds us that even when we do all we can to do what is right, we will fail anyway. We are totally dependent on the grace of God.

11 – This chapter is a list of the families who moved to live within the walls of Jerusalem. It also tells where some of the others lived, especially some of the priests and Levites. V1-2 "Now the leaders of the

people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten remained in the other towns. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem."

12 – The chapter begins with a listing of the priests according to the heads of the families. The genealogy is important because that is how they traced their legitimacy as priests. Some of the program is outlined for the ceremony to dedicate the wall. Much music is a part of the ceremony and it is set up "according to the commandment of David, the man of God." Also at the conclusion it is stated that the people offered their tithes and offerings to the Levites and they gave to the support of the priests. It appears that things are restored to where they should have been all along, except now they are on a smaller scale, a remnant. V43 "And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away."

13 – Nehemiah returned to his job in Babylon after 12 years as governor. After a short time he returned to Jerusalem and had to bring about some changes. One was to exclude foreigners from the worship of God. Another was to stop buying and selling on the Sabbath. They stopped people from marrying foreigners. Nehemiah is very interesting in how he carries this out. He is very physical which does not mean that is the way everyone is to do it. He does get the job done and does it all committing himself to God in prayer. Note the number of verbs used with the pronoun "I" in the chapter. Nehemiah is personally involved in carrying out God's will. "I found out...I warned...I confronted...I commanded...I chased him...I cleansed them...I established the duties...I provided for..." V31 "Remember me, O my God, for good."