

Nehemiah: A Righteous Governor to Jerusalem and Example to All
A Study of the Book of Nehemiah¹

The Book of Nehemiah – Foundational Study Guide Contents

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Introduction

Continuing with our efforts to strive to be a people of biblical prayer, we will now be directing our attention to the book of Nehemiah where we observe a model of disciplined and spontaneous prayer by a man uniquely used of God. The format of the book is historical narrative and it details one of the most extraordinary achievements – rebuilding the city walls of Jerusalem in only fifty-two days. However, Nehemiah was not simply a master contractor, but a righteous God-fearing man who knew the Scriptures, was mighty in prayer, and perceptive to the works and good pleasure of the Lord.

The nature of the introductory lesson is one of intensive exposure and has been designed to be a resource and aid as you do the diligent and rewarding work of vigorously examining the Scriptures. For some persons three weeks for an overview of a book such as Nehemiah may well seem superfluous, as if it will leave one with little to do after a very short time. However, if you apply yourself as I am encouraging you to throughout this material, then I am persuaded that you will establish a wonderful base for our engagement of the various portions of Nehemiah in the following weeks and you will soon discover that three weeks for this background study will provoke a desire for more time in the Scriptures.

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School
ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

General Background Material, Chart, and Maps

Authorship of Nehemiah

While significant portions are first-hand accounts from Nehemiah, the general consensus is that Ezra, his contemporary, was the author.²

There are, however, reasonable grounds to argue for Nehemiah authorship too. Neither conclusion does the book harm or calls into question the integrity of its contents or its placement in the Scriptures.

Time of Nehemiah

“The events in Nehemiah 1 commence late in the year 446 B.C., the 20th year of the Persian king, Artaxerxes (464-423 B.C.). The book follows chronologically from Nehemiah’s first term as governor of Jerusalem ca. 445-433 B.C. (Neh. 1-12) to his second term, possibly beginning ca. 424 B.C. (Neh. 13). Nehemiah was written by Ezra sometime during or after Nehemiah’s second term, but no later than 400 B.C.”³

Historical Context

King Solomon allowed the plethora of wives that he took for himself to lead his heart astray, and he gave himself to their shameful idolatrous ways. The consequence of this was that the kingdom would be torn away from him and given to another. However, because of Solomon’s father, David, the line would retain the tribe of Judah and this judgment would not be applied during Solomon’s own lifetime.

“And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, ‘Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.’” 1 Kings 11:9-13

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, was made King of Israel when Solomon died. It was under King Rehoboam’s reign that the Kingdom of Israel was divided and the Davidic line was effectively left with Judah to rule (known now as the Southern Kingdom or the Kingdom of Judah) and the remainder of Israel (known now as the Northern Kingdom or the Kingdom of Israel) was now ruled by numerous kings outside of the Davidic line.

Israel (the Northern Kingdom) was riddled with idolatry and wickedness and finally suffered the judgment of God by means of being overthrown and exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

“In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.” 2 Kings 17:6

² The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.656

³ MacArthur, Pg.656

Judah (The Southern Kingdom) mimicked the profane wickedness of their sister kingdom Israel and, though they had seasons of revival on various levels, they too ultimately were overthrown and exiled, but by the Babylonians who had assumed the greater authority in the region. Judah's demise effectively came in three waves:

1. 605 BC - This is when Daniel and other members of Judah's elite were taken into captivity (see Daniel 1:1-6).⁴
2. 597 BC - Jehoiakim was taken into captivity (see 2 Chron 36:5,6). Three months and ten days later Jehoiachin, along with other members of the royal family, were taken into captivity (see 2 Chron 36:9,10 & 2 Kings 24:15-17).⁵
3. 586 BC - After a siege lasting approximately one and a half years, Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed. Most of the people were taken into captivity, along with articles from the temple. Only the poorest people remained (see 2 Kings 25).⁶

“And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, and the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him. They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.”
2 Kings 25:1-7

The time of the captivity was prophesied through Jeremiah to be seventy years and later Daniel himself found confidence in this precise timing provided by Jeremiah's prophecy.

“Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste. I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.” Jeremiah 25:12-14

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” Daniel 9:1-2

In view of the nature of the ruling of nations John MacArthur provides a helpful insight into the magnitude of this book's activities and demonstrates that they were the fruit of God's faithfulness to his people.

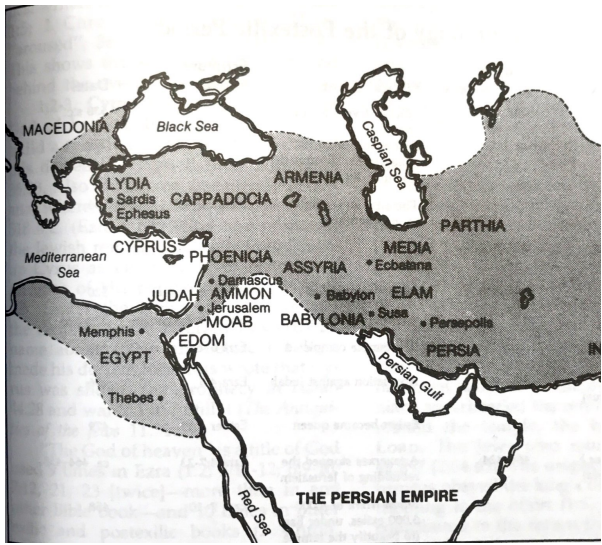
⁴ <http://www.bibleworldhistory.com/70Years.htm> - accessed on September 14, 2017 at 17:59 HRS EST

⁵ <http://www.bibleworldhistory.com/70Years.htm> - accessed on September 14, 2017 at 17:59 HRS EST

⁶ <http://www.bibleworldhistory.com/70Years.htm> - accessed on September 14, 2017 at 17:59 HRS EST

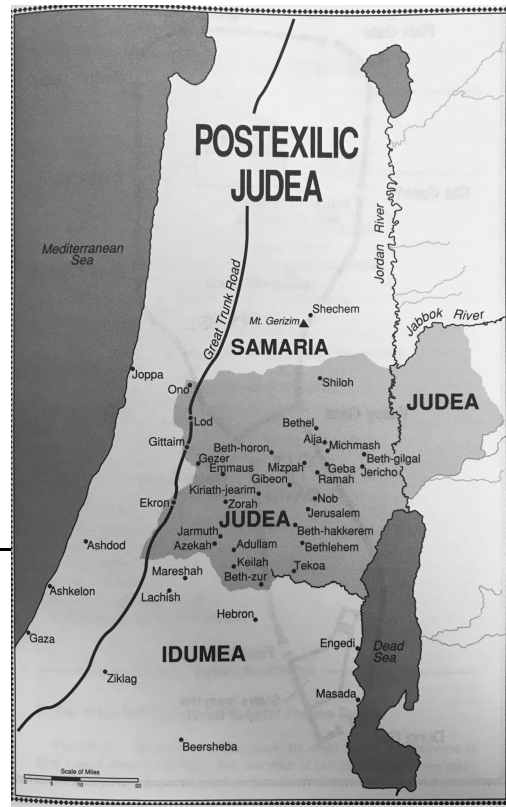
“At the time in Judah’s history, the Persian Empire dominated the entire Near Eastern world. Its administration of Judah, although done with a loose hand, was mindful of disruptions or any signs of rebellion from its vassals. Rebuilding the walls of conquered cities posed the most glaring threat to the Persian central administration. Only a close confidant of the king himself could be trusted for such an operation. At the most critical juncture in Judah’s revitalization, God raised up Nehemiah to exercise one of the most trusted roles in the empire, the King’s cupbearer and confidant. Life under the Persian king Artaxerxes (ca 464-423 B.C.) had its advantages for Nehemiah. Much like Joseph, Esther, and Daniel, he had attained a significant role in the palace which then ruled the ancient world, a position from which God could use him to lead the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls in spite of its implications for Persian control of that city.”⁷

Map of the Persian Empire



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Map of Postexilic Judea



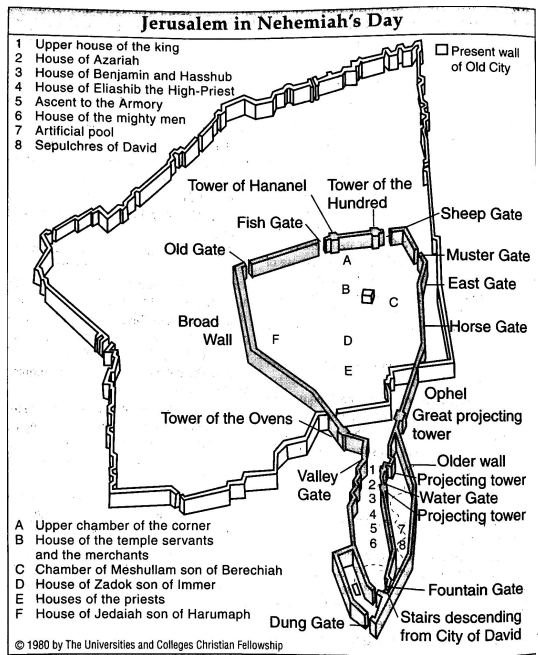
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⁷ MacArthur, Pg.656

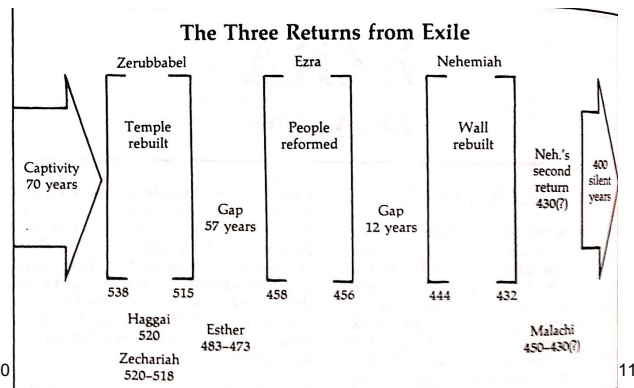
⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Ezra: John A. Martin, David C. Cook Publisher, 1985 (Hereafter: Martin), Pg.653

⁹ The New American Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Mervin Breneman; Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993; Pg.13

Jerusalem in Nehemiah's Day



Timeline Overview from Captivity through the End of the Old Testament Canon



Comprehensive Outline of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1

Introduction of Jerusalem's present struggle. (1:1-3)

Introduction of Nehemiah: person, month, year, and location. (1:1)

Introduction of Hanani (1:2,7:2,12:36) and the report of the Jews and Jerusalem's walls/gates. (1:2-3)

Nehemiah's theologically rich/informed prayer of repentance and request for restoration. (1:4-11)

The context of the prayer: heard the news, sat down, wept and mourned for days, engaged in fasting and praying to God. (1:4)

Prayer of repentance and petition for Israel. (1:5-11)

Precise petition to find favor before the king to whom he served as the cupbearer. (1:11)

Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah petitions the king and secures his authorization and help to go rebuild Jerusalem. (2:1-8)

Establishment of context of Nehemiah's engagement with the king: month, year, ruling king (Artaxerxes), when Nehemiah was bringing him wine, and the unique disposition of sadness that Nehemiah had in the king's presence. (2:1)

¹⁰ MacArthur, Pg.662

¹¹ Martin, Pg.652

Initial engagement with the king that results in an inquiry of request by the king. (2:2-4)

Nehemiah petitions God before answering the king. (2:4)

Nehemiah makes his request(s) known to the king: he desires to rebuild Jerusalem. (2:5)

The king negotiates the details with Nehemiah, permission is granted, and initial logistics are established: how long Nehemiah will be gone and when will he return, letters for governors, letters for suppliers, and building plans. (2:6-8)

Nehemiah affirms that these favorable results were from God. (2:8)

Nehemiah begins the initial and diplomatic steps to the rebuilding effort - also opposition is introduced. (2:9-10)

Introduction of Sanballat (2:10,2:19,4:1,4:7,6:1,6:2,6:5,6:12,6:14,13:28) and Tobiah (2:10,2:19,4:3,4:7,6:1,6:12,6:14,6:17,6:19,7:62,13:4,13:7,13:8). (2:10)

Introduction of opposition - anger that someone was seeking the welfare of the people of Israel. (2:10)

Nehemiah surveyed the nature and scope of the work God had put in his heart for Jerusalem. (2:11-16)

The context of Nehemiah's scouting mission: in Jerusalem three days, surveyed the city by night, only accompanied by a few men and the animal he rode, no one knew the heart of this work yet, and the systematic route of inspection. (2:11-15)

The officials and workers were not privileged to his scouting mission or its intent at this time. (2:16)

Nehemiah provides the foundational charge for the work and demonstrates his resolve to answer slanderous opposition. (2:17-20)

Nehemiah charges the people in the restoration of Jerusalem and provides assurance that God and king support this work - the people responded favorably. (2:17-18)

Those who would oppose Israel's welfare are already introducing false accusations. (2:19)

Introduction of Geshem (2:19,6:1,6:2,6:6). (2:19)

Nehemiah rebukes the opposition by affirming God's favor and their lack of standing. (2:20)

Nehemiah 3

The work of restoration begins - persons are detailed along with the sections of the wall and the gates that they were working to restore. (3:1-32)

Gates and portions referenced: Sheep Gate, Tower of the Hundred, Tower of Hananel, and sections of wall between various gates/towers. (3:1-2)

Gates and portions referenced: Fish Gate and sections of wall. (3:3-5)

Gates and portions referenced: Gate of Yeshanah, Broad Wall, Tower of the Ovens, and sections of wall between various gates/towers. (3:6-12)

Gates and portions referenced: Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, Water Gate, Wall of Ophel, and sections of wall between various gates/towers. (3:13-27)

Gates and portions referenced: Horse Gate, East Gate, Muster Gate, Sheep Gate, and sections of wall between various gates/towers. (3:28-32)

Nehemiah directly names approximately fifty-four persons or units of people.

Nehemiah provides a range of persons/trades involved: high priest, priests, men of various cities/regions, governor, goldsmiths, perfumers, district rulers, temple servants, gate keeper, and merchants.

Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah and the Jews encounter opposition and struggle from without and within, but restore their focus and drive when fixed on the Lord from whom they find their confidence and strength. (4:1-14)

Sanballat takes a leadership posture for being an outside means of opposition to the Jews and their work of rebuilding the walls. (4:1)

Sanballat peppers outside opposition with five pointed questions of opposition and mockery against the Jews and the work - questioning: the work, the motivations, the advantages, the success, and the challenges. (4:2)

Tobiah also joins in the opposition by providing derisive mockery. (4:3)

Nehemiah prays that the Lord would be the one to answer this opposition - dealing justly with them for their offenses. (4:4-5)

Progress Report: the wall was joined together at half its height. (4:6)

Opposition transitioned from lies, slander, and mockery to military threat. (4:7-8)

Nehemiah responds to the threat of attack with prayer and a tactically prepared response. (4:9)

The consequences of fatigue, opposition, and friendly concern took their cumulative toll and Nehemiah assumes the role of a God-fearing General for the Jews in Jerusalem. (4:10-14)

The workers were struggling under the burdens of the work. (4:10)

The enemies were plotting and scheming against them. (4:11)

The Jews in the surrounding areas were petitioning for them to flee to refuge among them. (4:12)

Nehemiah prepares the hands and hearts of the people for battle - fixing their attention first on the Lord and second on their people. (4:13-14)

Nehemiah leads the people in the continued reconstruction of the wall while keeping them immediately ready for military conflict. (4:15-23)

Nehemiah affirms that the freedom to return to the work was on account of God spoiling their enemies' plans. (4:15)

The work continued with workers who were battle-ready, including Nehemiah. (4:16-23)

Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah addresses and brings to resolution an internal offense among the Jews - demonstrating his capacity to govern in a God-fearing way. (5:1-13)

Many of the Jews were suffering hardships that were further complicated by the burden of interest and acquiring of assets from them by other Jews. (5:1-5)

Nehemiah rebuked the offending parties and called them to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects a fear of God and does not provide grounds for the opposition to taunt them. (5:6-11)

The offending parties relented and restored the offended parties. (5:12)

Nehemiah codified the agreement by making the offending parties swear by their promise and by laying out a curse if they violated their promise, but they did keep it. (5:12-13)

Nehemiah served as a righteous/God-fearing Governor of Judah for twelve years. (5:14-19)

Nehemiah feared God and did not take unnecessary advantage of the people - lording his authority over them like prior governors. (5:14-15)

Nehemiah labored with the people, was generous in his hospitality (including its range of diplomatic applications), and he did not burden the people with his position's benefits. (5:16-18)

Nehemiah prayed that God would remember his faithful leading and treatment of the people. (5:19)

Nehemiah 6

Hearing of the success of the work, the external opposition attempted to do Nehemiah harm, and executed a campaign of deception and finally an attempt at extortion. (6:1-9)

The context was that the walls were effectively completed (the gates still needing some final attention). (6:1)

Sanballat and Geshem four times sent a request to meet with Nehemiah - veiling their intent to do him harm, but Nehemiah rejected all such attempts. (6:2-4)

After the prior failed attempts the fifth effort was one of overt extortion - a demand to meet or have a malicious and dangerous lie be sent up to the king, Nehemiah rebuked and rejected this attempt too. (6:5-8)

Nehemiah provides commentary of the attempts - efforts to stop the work's completion. (6:9)

Nehemiah petitions God for perseverance. (6:9)

Tobiah and Sanballat hired others to deceive Nehemiah and provoke him to act out of fear and self-preservation so that he might sin and be brought under repute. (6:10-14)

The plot included a false threat on Nehemiah's life by night so as to provoke him to fearfully take refuge in the Temple. (6:10)

Nehemiah rebuked the effort to entrap him - seeing the offense for the deceptive plot that it was and that it was the work of Tobiah and Sanballat. (6:11-13)

Nehemiah petitioned God to remember the offensive efforts of Tobiah and Sanballat as well as the co-conspirators who attempted to make him fear man and not God. (6:14)

The completion of the wall provoked fear in the enemies that surrounded the Jews as the success experienced here was clearly the work of God. (6:15-16)

Date of completion was precisely provided: The twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul (sixth month of the year)- fifty-two days from when it was begun. (6:15)

The surrounding nations were afraid as they accurately perceived this great accomplishment as the work of God. (6:16)

There was still residual opposition as Tobiah was actively corresponding with the nobles of Judah as they were relationally tied to him and Tobiah attempted to write Nehemiah letters to make him afraid. (6:17-19)

Nehemiah 7

Upon the completion of the walls and the necessary appointments that followed, Nehemiah appointed another God-fearing man, Hanani, to govern Jerusalem - with the charge he also gave instructions for keeping the delicate city secure where established. (7:1-4)

Following the work's completion the following were appointed : gatekeepers, singers, and Levites, Hanani was given charge of the city. (7:1-2)

Hanani was appointed because he was more faithful and God-fearing than many. (7:2)

Precise instructions regarding the timing of the opening of the gates and security elements were established. (7:3)

The context for this present state of vulnerability was the large size of the city and its limited occupation. (7:4)

Submitting to God's purposes Nehemiah enrolled the people by their genealogy - a comprehensive process of categorizing the people and discerning numbers of persons present as well as fundamental connections among them including identity within the people and qualification for service. (7:5-69)

Nehemiah found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first. (7:5)

A record, of the Babylonian exiles who came up out of captivity and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, was found. (7:6-7)

Detailed genealogy of persons by family and like units of identification. (7:8-60)

Groups of persons with genealogical disputes which limited their identification and privilege of service until proper clarification could be secured. (7:61-65)

Final totals of persons and various categories of general record including beasts of burden and service. (7:66-69)

Records of gifts that were provided for the work and the services of the Jews, including priestly garments. (7:70-72)

Reference to various groups of persons living in their towns and the contextual time marker of the seventh month. (7:73)

Nehemiah 8

Following the completion of the wall there was an assembling of all the people to hear the Book of the Law of Moses read aloud by Ezra the scribe, and he along with some of the Levites expounded the Scriptures for the people to understand them. (8:1-8)

Contextual information provided: All the people were gathered, the location was the square before the Water Gate, Ezra the scribe read the Book of the Law of Moses, this occurred on the first day of the seventh month, and Ezra read from morning until midday. (8:1-3)

Ezra read from an elevated platform and was accompanied by thirteen identified men as the people stood, listened, affirmed the truths of the Scriptures - lifting their hands, and worshipped with bowed heads and faces to the ground. (8:4-6)

Thirteen Levites are named who assisted in this work by also reading from the Law of God - reading clearly and expounding it for the people. (8:7-8)

Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people identified this day (first day of the seventh month) as a holy day - one of rejoicing and celebration among themselves, not a day of mourning and grieving. (8:9-12)

The exhortation from the leadership was for the people to not continue with their initial responses of mourning or weeping from hearing the words of the Law, but to consecrate the day as holy to The LORD their God. (8:9)

Instructions were provided to the people as they were dispersed - to go and generously celebrate this day in The LORD amongst themselves, which the people did. (8:10-12)

The following day, the second day of the seventh month, the leadership of the people came together to study the Scriptures with Ezra and they observed the charge to keep the Feast of Booths and they in turn led the people to fully comply with these ordinances. (8:13-18)

The identified leadership who assembled to study the Scriptures: the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, the priest, and the Levites. (8:13)

The observation of the charge to keep the Feast of Booths as recorded in the Scriptures. (8:14-15)

The faithful keeping of the ordinance and its uniquely distinguished application (unlike it had been kept since the time of Joshua). (8:16-18)

Contextual details provided. (8:17-18)

Booths were made on the people's roofs and in their courts, in the courts of the Temple, in the square at the Water Gate, and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. (8:17)

The Scriptures were ready daily by Ezra, there was a feast kept for seven days, and then on the eighth day was a solemn assembly. (8:18)

Nehemiah 9

On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month the people of Israel again assembled with a disposition of complete humility and submission to the Scriptures - submitting themselves to the hearing of the Scriptures, to confession, and to worship. (9:1-3)

The people's humility was demonstrated by fasting, the wearing of sackcloth, and the covering of their heads with dirt. (9:1)

The people separated themselves from all foreigners and confessed their sins - their own sins and the sins of their fathers. (9:2)

For a quarter of the day they read from the Book of the Law and for another quarter of the day made confession and worshipped The LORD. (9:3-4)

The people are then led by a group of Levites in a theologically rich prayer that gave attention to a sweep of Redemptive History - highlighting The LORD's magnificent care and wonderful workings. (9:5-37)

Eight Levites were identified in the leading of this prayer that had the explicit emphasis on the people blessing The LORD their God. (9:5)

The prayer begins with affirming God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things. (9:6)

The prayer then goes on to address six sweeping seasons of Redemptive History as it was expressed and worked itself out through the covenant people Israel. (9:7-37)

The LORD's choosing and calling of Abraham, the establishment of covenant with Abraham, and the faithful keeping of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants. (9:7-8)

The magnificent Exodus account - the delivering of The LORD's people from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the supernatural provisions of care while the people were being led to the Promised Land. (9:9-15)

The LORD's enduring mercy, care, and provision through Israel's rebelliousness in the wilderness and their extended time of wandering. (9:16-21)

The LORD's championing of Israel's conquest of their Promised Land. (9:22-25)

The LORD's faithfulness and righteous disciplining of his rebellious people - from the time of the Judges through the time of the Prophets and Kings. (9:26-31)

The attention then centers on the people's persistent rebelliousness and The LORD's persistent faithfulness - there was a particular focus on the admission, grief, weight, and consequences of sin as potently demonstrated from the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom to the Babylonian conquest of Judah the effects of which continued to this present time. (9:32-37)

In view of the present condition on account of the longstanding pattern of sinful rebelliousness and the present disposition of brokenness and repentance, the people sought to enter into a covenant reflecting their repentance and desire to be restored. (9:38)

Nehemiah 10

The aforementioned covenant was sealed with eighty-four personal names and general references to others - of those named they were identified as: the governor, priests, Levites, and chiefs of the people. (10:1-27)

The people joined in entering into covenant with God to separate themselves to the Law of God and keep its commandments, rules, and statutes - making five precise affirmations at the time of their binding themselves to the larger scope of the Law. (10:28-39)

Context of persons identified here: The rest of the Jews, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the nations to the Law of God. (10:28-29)

Affirmation: No intermarriage with the nations. (10:30)

Affirmation: No violation of the Sabbath by commerce activity. (10:31)

Affirmation: Keeping of the year of Jubilee. (10:31)

Affirmation: Maintaining of the proper tithes/sacrifices. (10:32-38)

Affirmation: No neglecting of the Temple. (10:39)

Nehemiah 11

An accounting of those who lived within the city of Jerusalem - the leaders of the people and ten percent of the people who were chosen by the casting of lots while the remaining ninety percent remained in their towns. (11:1-24)

Various groups are identified as living within Jerusalem: chiefs of the province, certain of the sons of Judah and Benjamin, priests, Levites, and gatekeepers.

Various villages and locations were also identified where Jews were living outside of Jerusalem. (11:25-36)

Nehemiah 12

An audit of priests and Levites was provided including numerous names, identifications, association with historical time/persons, and a measure of detail regarding various areas of service. (12:1-26)

A comprehensive worshipful celebration of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem is detailed - various persons, elements of leadership, structures of worship, and the respective locations of those involved. (12:27-43)

The Levites and singers were brought to the city from their various places of residence and service for this dedication - their singing was accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. (12:27-29)

The priests and Levites purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall. (12:30)
The leaders of Judah were placed on the wall and divided into two groups while the
choirs of those giving thanks stood in the Temple. (12:31-43)
There was singing, playing of instruments, and great sacrifices offered to God.
(12:31-43)

Jerusalem's joy was heard from far away. (12:43)

The Temple order of tithing/provision of the Levites, priests, and musicians was reestablished. (12:44-47)

Nehemiah 13

Reading from the Book of Moses the Jews came to the proper conclusion that they were to be a separate/distinct people and that some relationships would not be permitted so they responded accordingly. (13:1-3)

On account of the historical incident and the offense of Balaam - the Ammonites and Moabites were not permitted in the assembly of God. (13:1-2)

Hearing the prohibition of association the Israelites separated themselves. (13:3)

Nehemiah undertakes four substantial reforms - rebuking and correcting areas where the Jews had significantly strayed sometime after Jerusalem was restored and their time of struggle had subsided. (13:4-31)

Nehemiah restored the Temple chambers. (13:4-9)

Eliashib the priest abused his role that provided him oversight of the Temple chambers by not having them used for their proper service, but rather allowing them to be defiled - serving as a chamber for the wicked opponent of the Jews, Tobiah. (13:4-5)

This offense was occurring while Nehemiah was away - having returned to king Artaxerxes as he had stated that he would before being authorized to return to Jerusalem. (13:6)

Upon returning to Jerusalem Nehemiah discovered and addressed Eliashib/Tobiah's offense and saw the matter through a proper restoration - including a cleansing and reinstatement of intended services of the Temple chambers. (13:7-9)

Nehemiah restored the Levites and singers provisional care. (13:10-14)

Nehemiah discovered that the Levites and singers were provided their allotted portions and therefore left their posts of service. (13:10)

Nehemiah confronted the officials and rebuked this negligence as it was an offense against the Temple in addition to the persons - the matter was corrected and reliable men were put in place to see that this stewardship was properly handled from that time forward. (13:11-13)

Nehemiah prayed that God would remember his good deeds of service to the Temple and those who serve in it. (13:14)

Nehemiah restored the integrity of the Sabbath from violations of commerce on the day of rest. (13:15-22)

Nehemiah observed overt Sabbath violations in Judah as well as within Jerusalem proper - treading winepresses, bringing in loads of commerce, and conducting business. (13:15-16)

Nehemiah confronted the nobles of Judah for this grave offense for which Israel had already paid a great price and were at this time advancing toward great danger of judgment for again profaning the Sabbath. (13:17-18)

Nehemiah then instituted an aggressive means of addressing this offense and then went on to institute a means by which it would be protected against in the future too. (13:19-22)

Nehemiah again prayed that God would remember his efforts at faithfulness on behalf of the people and the city. (13:22)

Nehemiah restored the integrity of marriage within the context of its restrictions for the covenant people of God. (13:23-31)

Nehemiah observed that some of the people had intermarried with those outside the people of Israel and were already suffering the initial consequences of the loss of the language of Judah. (13:23-24)

Nehemiah aggressively engaged those who had committed this offense and compelled them to oath in the name of God to not continue this practice which was the very thing that so radically contributed to King Solomon's own great demise - this activity would not be permitted to continue. (13:25-27)

This offense was even exercised by one of the grandsons of the high priest - uniting the high priestly line with one of the most egregious enemies of the Jews in this present context, Sanballat who was this man's father-in-law. (13:28)

Nehemiah prays that God would remember him in his engaging this offense of the desecration of the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. (13:29)

Following his severe engagement of the offenders Nehemiah saw to it that matters were properly restored - particularly with the priest and Levites and he went on to supply provisions for their work. (13:30-31)

Nehemiah concludes with a final prayer, "Remember me, O my God, for good." (13:31)

Key Words and Themes of Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1

Jerusalem, Prayer, The Law of God, Covenant, Fearing God, Success in God's Work

Nehemiah 2

Jerusalem, Prayer, The King and Governmental Procedures, Antagonistic Persons, City/Walls/Gates, Details, Building the Walls/Gates

Nehemiah 3

City/Walls/Gates, Details, Building the Walls/Gates, Detailed Audit of Labor and Laborers

Nehemiah 4

Antagonistic Persons, Aggressive Opposition/Threats, Fearing Man (Threats), Fearing God (Obedience), Prayer, Building the Walls/Gates, Proactive Defensive Posture

Nehemiah 5

Righteous/Charitable Governing, Restoration From Offense(s), Fearing God (Conduct), Leadership Modeled, Building the Walls/Gates, Prayer

Nehemiah 6

Antagonistic Persons, Aggressive Opposition/Threats, Fearing Man (Threats), Fearing God (Obedience), Prayer, Building the Walls/Gates, Completing the Wall

Nehemiah 7

Government/Personnel Assignment(s), Genealogies, Public Offerings

Nehemiah 8

Ezra the Scribe/Priest, The Book of the Law/Moses, Restoring the Feast of Booths

Nehemiah 9

Prayer: Confession, Prayer: Worshipful Affirmation of God, Prayer: Truth Rich Reflection of the Law, The Law of God, Present Struggle, Covenant with God (To Keep The Law)

Nehemiah 10

Covenant with God (Signees), Covenant with God (To Keep The Law)

Nehemiah 11

Record of Persons Living in Jerusalem, Records of Leaders, Persons, and Locations

Nehemiah 12

Record of the Priest and Levites, Dedication of The Wall, Dedication with Song/Music, Dedication with Sacrifice, Restoring Distinction of Levites and Priests

Nehemiah 13

Reading and Submission to the Law, Separation of Persons Outside Israel, Creeping Toward Disobedience, Small-Scale Restoration of Temple, Small-Scale Restoration of Levite/Priest's Care, Prayer, Small-Scale Restoration of Sabbath

Chapter Summaries for Nehemiah

Nehemiah 1

Nehemiah is broken and pleading for God's mercy for his covenant people.

Nehemiah 2

Authorization and the genesis of the work - this was God's work and would be accomplished by his people, but opposition would be present.

Nehemiah 3

An accounting of the laborers and their work (details regarding persons and their family were included as well as details regarding the scope and nature of their work).

Nehemiah 4

Angry external threats from outside that were present on account of their success was met with prayer, confidence in God, prepared force, and perseverance in the work.

Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah rebukes those taking fiscal advantage of their fellow people's compromised condition and he by contrast models sacrificial leadership himself.

Nehemiah 6

As the wall was coming to a completion the outside forces of opposition appear to have become more aggressive in strategy and tactic (ultimately trying to intimidate and provoke fear) - Nehemiah stood fast, prayed, and trusted The LORD as the wall was finally completed.

Nehemiah 7

Primarily a genealogical summary of persons present in the greater Jerusalem area (this was an assignment put on Nehemiah's heart by God) and following the genealogy (likely associated with it) was a record of offerings/gifts.

Nehemiah 8

The people came together to hear, apply, and rejoice in the Scriptures - this was followed up with the leadership continuing this discipline and then responding with conviction and obedience (here keeping the Feast of Booths - neglected for hundreds of years).

Nehemiah 9

The people gave their attention to a humbled disposition while they heard the Scriptures and confessed their sins. This in turn developed into a time of prayer that recalled the faithfulness of God throughout Redemptive History and a petition that he might again have mercy here.

Nehemiah 10

The people gave themselves to the Scriptures and were humbled - they prayed affirming God's testimony of faithfulness and mercy toward his people and they petition that they might again know such a grace. The prayer concluded and they entered into a fresh covenant with The LORD.

Nehemiah 11

A personal accounting of the men residing in the city of Jerusalem as well as some who appear to have been encamped in other areas.

Nehemiah 12

A detailed accounting of the priests and Levites who served a strong role of worshipful music and song at the dedication of the wall - then post dedication the respectable acts of taking care of them and the Temple was addressed.

Nehemiah 13

Nehemiah was gone for a season and the Temple was being abused, the Sabbath was being abused, and the priesthood/marriages were being abused - he confronted and restored all three areas of offense and entrusted himself to The LORD as he sought personal obedience and faithfulness as a leader.

Reflection and Application

I have provided you a model of engaging the book of Nehemiah as a whole before we take time in the weeks ahead to engage its parts and sections. Now, it is your turn to apply what has been modeled. You are not being asked to mimic the provided material, but to use it as a guide. This level of engagement will transition you from being a good Sunday School participant to a disciple who will have a rich and cherished understanding of the book of Nehemiah.

Key Words, Themes, and Chapter Summaries

Read and/or listen to the book of Nehemiah four to five times. Review the material that has been provided in this guide and then read through each chapter again and work on identifying key words and themes from each chapter. Finally, write out a concise chapter summary.

Nehemiah 1

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 2

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 3

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 4

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 5

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 6

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 7

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 8

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 9

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 10

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 11

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 12

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Nehemiah 13

Key Words/Themes:

Summary:

Outlining Nehemiah

Now, go back through each chapter and try to draft an outline of its major sections. The outline I have provided is intended to be a teaching tool and resource – it is extremely comprehensive. Your outline should be much more simplistic, but a tool to see the elements of the book.

Nehemiah 1

Nehemiah 7

Nehemiah 2

Nehemiah 8

Nehemiah 3

Nehemiah 9

Nehemiah 4

Nehemiah 10

Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah 11

Nehemiah 6

Nehemiah 12

Nehemiah 13

Observations

Now that you have read and/or listened to Nehemiah a number of times and have intensely engaged the breadth of its elements, review your work and record answers to the following questions.

What are some things you have observed about the person and work of God at this moment in Redemptive History?

What are some things you have observed about the nature of man and the impact that a fear of God has verses the impact of fearing man?

What are some things you have observed about the impact of the Scriptures on life and conduct?

What are some transferable principles for living well before God and your fellow man that you can apply from Nehemiah?

Search The Scriptures

Nehemiah was a man of constant prayer - examine the following texts that address the act and/or content of Nehemiah's prayers and then use the following questions to help you make robust observations from these passages.

What was happening at this time?

Why was he praying in this moment?

What was the nature or content of his prayer?

How did fear of God over fear of man influence this prayer?

How did the Scriptures inform this prayer?

What can I learn from this prayer and how will I apply it to my own prayer life?

What are some other general observations/thoughts from this text?

Nehemiah 1:4-11

Nehemiah 2:4

Nehemiah 4:4-5
