

Old Testament Survey

Nehemiah

Introduction

- The book of Nehemiah takes place in 444 B.C. and follows the book of Ezra chronologically. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to **King Artaxerxes I**, a powerful king over the Medo-Persian Empire. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem 14 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem. Bible scholars note that Nehemiah may have lived until about 400 B.C.
- The Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon in 538 B.C. As Ezra was sent by God to instruct Judah in the Law, so was Nehemiah led by God to oversee the rebuilding of Jerusalem's **wall**.
- Nehemiah marks the historical and prophetic 70 weeks of **Daniel** (Daniel 9:25). From the decree to rebuild the wall until the coming of the Messiah, there would be 69 weeks of years (more on this when we get to Daniel).

Nehemiah 1-7-Construction of the Wall

- Nehemiah 1:1 records Nehemiah's presence in Susa, which was the **capital** of the Medo-Persian Empire. The existence of this capital was prophesied by Daniel in Daniel 8:2.
- One of Nehemiah's brothers reported to Nehemiah about the poor condition of Jerusalem and of those who were occupying the area. (1:1-3).
- After hearing the report, Nehemiah **fasted** and **prayed** for Jerusalem. This prayer is very like the prayers of Ezra and Daniel. Moses stated in Deuteronomy 30:1-4 and in Deuteronomy 30:17-25 that God would hear and heal a repentant Israel but would punish Israel if they neglected God. Knowing this, Nehemiah fervently sought God's forgiveness for Israel's sins.
- After much prayer and fasting, Nehemiah asked for King Artaxerxes' permission to return to Israel and rebuild the wall. Ezra 4:7-23 records an earlier decree by Artaxerxes for the rebuilding of the wall to **stop**.
- King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in **444** B.C. (Nehemiah 2:7-9). This decree began the countdown of Daniel 9 to the exact day in which Christ entered Jerusalem.
- After Nehemiah inspected the wall, he encouraged the people to begin the construction. After Nehemiah explained how God had given him favor in the eyes of King Artaxerxes, the people were strengthened and had a **determined** will to begin construction (2:17-18).
- It is interesting to note how the people collectively united to build the wall (Nehemiah 3). When God does a mighty work, one can be sure that Satan will try to **stop** it. We will see this opposition in the following chapters.
- Nehemiah 4:1-2 gives the account of the local officials and those from surrounding areas taunting and threatening Israel (4:7-8). Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. Remember, Samaria had been the capital of Israel during the reign of the kings.
- Nehemiah gave words of encouragement to the people in chapter 4:14-15. Nehemiah prepared the people to work with their tools in one hand and a **weapon** in the other (4:17).

- Nehemiah rebuked the people in chapter 5 for buying, selling, and making slaves from among their Jewish brothers in order to repay debts. Nehemiah set an example for the people during his 12 years as governor over Jerusalem (5:14).
- The wall was completed in **52** days, an unprecedented short amount of time. It was obvious to all that God had enabled them to complete such a remarkable task (6:15-16). The wall was completed on September 21, 444 B.C.
- Nehemiah wanted to make sure that only those of **pure** Jewish heritage would populate the city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah chapter 7).

Nehemiah 8-13-The Rededication of the People under the Law

- Ezra was asked by the Jews to read and instruct the people in the ways of the Law. The Law was read and explained on the first day of the seventh month, which was the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24).
- Nehemiah 8:9-12 described the people's sorrow and remorse after hearing the Law of God. The Levites calmed the assembly and told them the feast was to be a time of great joy and celebration.
- Ezra instructed the people concerning the **Feast of Booths**. This feast was to be observed for one week beginning on the 15th of the seventh month (8:14-15).
- Nehemiah 9 gave an account of: the prayer by the people, praises to God for His blessings (9:20-21), the confessing sins; and the **commitment** in keeping the Laws.
- Nehemiah 9:31-10:1; 29 gives an account of the leaders, Levites, and priests who inscribed their names on a sealed document that committed them to serve the Lord.
- It is very interesting to note how the people, not only promised not to buy or sell on the Sabbath day, but to observe the seventh year of rest for the land. This was the reason for the **70-year** captivity in Babylon. The people had not observed the Sabbatical (seventh) year of the land for 490 years. Thus, God made sure the land rested for 70 years.
- Nehemiah 11:1 gives reference to Jerusalem as the "**holy city**." This is the first time that Jerusalem is given this name.
- Nehemiah 12 gives a chronological account of those who had come to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel about **100** years prior.
- There was a great dedication of Jerusalem's wall as recorded in Nehemiah 12:27.
- Nehemiah took a reprieve from Jerusalem and returned to Artaxerxes at **Babylon**. Babylon was an administrative center of the Persian Empire. After returning from Babylon, Nehemiah learned that Eliashib the priest had given Tobiah lodging within the temple's court. Angered by an Ammonite living in the court, Nehemiah threw Tobiah's belongings out and purified the room.
- Nehemiah had to purify the people and reprimanded them for marrying **foreigners** (13:23-26).
- Nehemiah purified the priests and made ready for sacrifices (13:30-31).

Summary

After the exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem, they received instructions from Ezra and Nehemiah. After much dedication and worship to God, the people began to quickly fall away. It is interesting to note that Nehemiah's last recorded acts were those of

purification and sacrifice. We too, must be diligent in asking for God's guidance while giving Him praise and asking for protection from sin.