

I. Quick Facts About the Book

- Narrative begins about 13 years after Ezra returned to Jerusalem
- Artaxerxes I has been the Persian king for 20 years (it is 445 B.C.).
- Nehemiah is Artaxerxes' cupbearer
- Author is unknown. See notes on Ezra.
- Two main themes in Nehemiah:
 - Restoration of Jerusalem's walls and gates
 - Commitment by the Jews to follow the Law of Moses

II. Nehemiah is a man who:

- Is concerned for his people.
 - In chapter 1, Nehemiah receives a distressing report from his brother and some other men. They have just returned from Jerusalem and things are not going well. The people are in distress and the city's walls and gates are in terrible condition.
 - Nehemiah appeals to God in prayer in 1:5-11. The things he includes are noteworthy:
 - ✓ Acknowledges God's power
 - ✓ Recognizes that God keeps His promises
 - ✓ Asks God to hear his prayer and see his suffering
 - ✓ Prayer is continual (day & night)
 - ✓ Prayer is focused (fasting, weeping)
 - ✓ Sins are confessed
 - ✓ God's promise of punishment is recalled
 - ✓ God's promise of deliverance upon repentance is recalled
 - ✓ Humility (**YOUR** servant, **YOUR** people)
 - ✓ Request is made for action
 - ✓ Nehemiah volunteers for service
 - Nehemiah is so troubled that Artaxerxes takes notice of his fallen countenance, as Nehemiah is normally of good cheer.
- Faced opposition and overcame it with faith in God.
 - Sanballat (region of Moab), Tobiah (Ammonite) and Geshem (Arabian) oppose Nehemiah's return and his efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and gates.
 - In chapter 2, 4 and 6, we see one or more of these enemies trying to frustrate Nehemiah's efforts.
 - They even plan to attack Jerusalem. Nehemiah reacts prudently by arming his workers and having them stand in shifts. Half the men would keep watch and the other half would work. Even those working wore swords in case trouble broke out. A warning system was even devised.
 - In 4:4, the enemies pray to their god while in 4:9, Nehemiah and the people pray to the true God.
 - 4:20 states that Nehemiah's confidence was not in spears, swords, bows or armor, but in God.
 - In chapter 6, we sadly see that even some of the Jewish noblemen were allies of the city's enemies. Perhaps Nehemiah had offended them by his actions in chapter 5.
- Was swift to action.
 - Nehemiah swiftly inspects the walls and gates of Jerusalem. He calls the leaders to action.
 - Organized teams do the work, and it is the effort of many, many people. Chapter 3 lists over 20 teams/groups of workers, each assigned to a particular section of wall or gate.
- Dealt with issues wisely.
 - In chapter 5, we see that there are economic and social problems in Jerusalem. Due to famine, food is scarce. Because of the king's taxes, money is short for many people. People are indebted to the nobles and wealthy in the city. Those that cannot pay back their debt are forced into slavery.
 - Nehemiah rebukes the nobles and rulers for charging interest, or usury. This practice is prohibited by the Torah (Exodus 22:24).
 - He essentially declares a jubilee year and the debts are forgiven (see Leviticus 25:1-55 & Deuteronomy 15:1-18).

- Nehemiah himself does without the portion of food allotted to him as governor. He does not want to contribute to the burden of the people for his own luxury (5:14-19).
- He led by example, not clinging to leadership, but passing it on to someone else (7:2).

III. **Reading, Repentance and Restoration (chs. 8-10)**

- The wall was complete on the 25th of Elul (6th month) after just 52 days of work. Just a few days later, on the 1st day of the seventh month (now known as Rosh Ha-Shana-Leviticus 23:23-25; Numbers 29:1-6), Ezra stood up before the people to read from the Torah.
- The people stood up when Ezra opened the scroll. There were six people on each side of Ezra (scholars say that the name Meshullam is the same as Zechariah). In modern synagogues, the people still stand as the Torah scroll is raised. On Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement, 10th day of seventh month-Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27, 28; 25:9; Numbers 29:7-11), six different men read from the Torah scroll to symbolize the six men who stood on each side of Ezra.
- Ezra read from the Torah from morning until mid-day on the first day. Many men and Levites helped explain the teachings to the people. It was not enough to simply hear the words of the Torah; the people had to understand them.
- The next day, the men discover that God's people were commanded to observe Sukkot, or the Feast of Booths (see Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-38). Neh. 8:18 tells us that Ezra read the Torah to the people for all seven days of the feast.
- On the 24th day of the month, the people assemble and confess their sins. This would normally occur on the 10th of that month. In 9:5-38, a lengthy prayer is made by the people. It recounts the Lord's blessing and oversight of Israel from the time of Abraham until now. They recognize the transgressions of both their forefathers and themselves. The men acknowledge that God provided teachings and commandments, but they did not follow them. They make a commitment to change that.
- The leaders, the Levites and all of the people enter into an oath in 10:29 & 30. They enumerate some specifics:
 - ✓ They will not intermarry with the foreign people of the land.
 - ✓ They will not conduct business on the Sabbath Day.
 - ✓ They will forgive debt and let their fields lay fallow every seventh year (Exodus 23:10, 11; Leviticus 25:2-5; Deuteronomy 15:1, 2).
 - ✓ They will donate 1/3 of a shekel every year to the service of the Temple.
 - ✓ They will provide wood for the burnt offerings.
 - ✓ They will bring their first fruits, firstborn livestock and firstborn sons before the Lord.
 - ✓ They will give tithes of their land to support the Levites.
 - ✓ They will bring offerings of grain, oil and wine as commanded.
 - ✓ The house of God will not be neglected.

IV. **Remember Me, O my God, for Good**

- People are assigned by lot to Jerusalem and the surrounding cities.
- In 12:27-43, Nehemiah conducts a great celebration and dedication ceremony for the wall. In 12:44-47, responsibilities are established in the Temple.
- In 13:1-3, any Ammonite or Moabite was excluded from Israel.
- Nehemiah returns to Babylon in the 32 year of King Artaxerxes (433 B.C.) after being in Jerusalem for 12 years. He remains there for an unspecified time and then returns to Jerusalem with leave from the king. He finds that Eliashib the priest had allied with Tobiah the Ammonite, giving this foreign enemy use of a storehouse dedicated to God's provisions.
- Nehemiah throws out the goods of Tobiah. He has the room cleansed. In the process, he also determines that the Levites had not received their portion as prescribed. The Levites had been forced back to work to provide for themselves, thereby neglecting the Temple.
- Nehemiah reinstates the Levites to their posts and places Shelemiah, Zadok and Pedaiah over the treasuries.
- He also finds people working on the Sabbath Day and admonishes the nobles. He begins the practice of closing the city gates so no traders can enter on the Sabbath Day.
- The Jews had also intermarried with foreign peoples, to the extent that the children even spoke foreign languages. Nehemiah not only censures them, he has them flogged and their hair torn out. He reminds them that this is a path Israel has already walked.