

Nehemiah

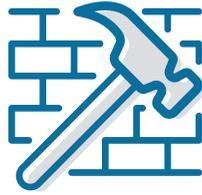


THRU^{the}BIBLE

NOTES & OUTLINES WITH

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HISTORY



Nehemiah

Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew canon.

WRITER: Perhaps Ezra. Nehemiah was a layman; Ezra was a priest. In the book of Ezra, the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the temple; in the book of Nehemiah, the emphasis is upon the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. In Ezra, we have the religious aspect of the return; in Nehemiah, we have the political aspect of the return. Ezra is a fine representative of the priest and scribe; Nehemiah is a noble representative of the businessman. Nehemiah had an important office at the court of the powerful Persian king, Artaxerxes, but his heart was with God's people and God's program in Jerusalem. The personal note is the main characteristic of the book.

DATE: Chronologically, this is the last of the historical books. We have come to the end of the line as far as time is concerned. The Old Testament goes no further. The book of Ezra picks up the thread of the story about 70 years after 2 Chronicles. The 70-year captivity is over and a remnant returns to the land of Israel. The return under Ezra takes place about 50 years after Zerubbabel. Nehemiah returns about 15 years after Ezra. These figures are approximate and are given to show the stages in the history of Israel after the captivity. This enables one to see how the "70 weeks" of

Daniel fit into the picture in a normal and reasonable way. The “70 weeks” of Daniel begin with the book of Nehemiah (not with Ezra) “from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks ...” The background of the events of Nehemiah is “... the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times” (Daniel 9:25).

Note: The following dates, suggested by Sir Robert Anderson, seem to be a satisfactory solution to the problem of the “70 weeks” of Daniel:

Decree of Cyrus, 536 B.C.—Ezra 1:1-4

Decree of Artaxerxes, 445 B.C. (twentieth year of his reign)—Nehemiah 2:1-8

The “70 weeks” begin. The first “seven weeks” end, 397 B.C.—Malachi.

(For details see Sir Robert Anderson’s *The Coming Prince*)

KEY WORD: “So” occurs 32 times. It denotes a man of action and few words. Mark this word in your Bible and notice how this ordinarily unimportant word stands out in this book.

KEY VERSES:

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. (Nehemiah 1:4)

And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? (Nehemiah 6:3)

OUTLINE:

I. **REBUILDING the WALLS**, Chapters 1–7

- A. Nehemiah's prayer for remnant at Jerusalem, Chapter 1
- B. Nehemiah's request of the king, return to Jerusalem, and review of ruins of Jerusalem, Chapter 2:1-16
- C. Nehemiah's encouragement to rebuild the walls, Chapter 2:17-20
- D. Rebuilding the walls and gates, Chapter 3
- E. Nehemiah's response to opposition, Chapters 4–6
Wall completed, 6:15
- F. Nehemiah's register of people, Chapter 7
(Only 42,360 people, 7,337 servants, and 245 singers returned. Compare this with the fact that Judah alone had 470,000 warriors [1 Chronicles 21:5].)

II. **REVIVAL and REFORM**, Chapters 8–13

- A. Great Bible reading led by Ezra, Chapter 8
- B. Revival—the result, Chapters 9, 10
- C. Reform—another result, Chapters 11–13

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY: God's chosen people were called to witness against idolatry, but too often they themselves succumbed and became idolaters. God sent them to Babylon, the fountainhead of idolatry, to take the gold cure. They returned repudiating idolatry.

Their restoration as an independent nation was incomplete. They were not free from this time on to the time of the Roman Empire. The New Testament opens with them under the rule of Rome.

COMMENT: This book reveals what God can do through a layman who has a heart for the things of God.

I. **REBUILDING the WALLS, Chapters 1–7**

A. Nehemiah's prayer for remnant at Jerusalem, Chapter 1

V. 1–The use of the first person pronoun gives the impression that Nehemiah was the writer. If Ezra was the writer, he was copying from the journal of Nehemiah. This book, as was true in the book of Ezra, has copies of letters, decrees, registers and other documents. The same man wrote both books—Ezra and Nehemiah are one book in the Hebrew canon.

W. 2-4–Visitors from Jerusalem come to the palace, and Nehemiah makes inquiry of them about Jerusalem and the condition of the remnant that had returned. When he learns the sad plight of the people and that the walls and gates of Jerusalem are still in shambles, Nehemiah sits down and weeps, mourns and fasts. Then he prays before the God of heaven (see note on Ezra 1:2 about the term “God of heaven”).

W. 5-11–This is the record of Nehemiah's prayer. “Terrible God” (v. 5 KJV) is “reverend God.” “Reverend” should never be used in addressing a pastor or ordained preacher. It should be applied only to God. Someone has expressed it this way:

*Call me Mister, call me friend,
A loving ear to all I lend,
But do not my soul with anguish rend,
PLEASE stop calling me “Reverend.”*

Nehemiah pleads with God and confesses his sins and those of his people (vv. 6, 7). He reminds God of His promises (vv. 8, 9). Nehemiah casts himself upon the mercy and goodness of God (vv. 10, 11). “This man” refers to King Artaxerxes.

B. Nehemiah's request of the king, return to Jerusalem, and review of ruins of Jerusalem, Chapter 2:1-16

W. 1-3–Nehemiah, the cupbearer of Artaxerxes, appears sad before the king—which evidently is unusual, as the king calls attention to it. Nehemiah explains that it is because of news from Jerusalem.

V. 4–The king gives him opportunity to make a request. Here begins the use of the little word “so” that occurs again and again.

V. 5–Nehemiah asks for a leave of absence that he might go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.

V. 6–The queen evidently supports Nehemiah in his request, and the king grants it.

W. 7-9–Nehemiah makes further request for material assistance and protection, as a government official, along the route. An honor guard from the king accompanies Nehemiah.

V. 10–The three leading enemies of Israel are grieved that Nehemiah has come to help his people.

W. 11-16–Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem, immediately makes a secret inspection of the damage, and estimates the extent of the job.

C. Nehemiah's encouragement to rebuild the walls, Chapter 2:17-20

W. 17, 18–Then Nehemiah calls together the leaders of Israel and reveals his plan to rebuild the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The people are encouraged to begin the undertaking.

V. 19–The three enemies use the weapon of ridicule to deter the people from attempting the Herculean project of rebuilding the walls and gates.

V. 20–Nehemiah's answer is brief. He would look to God and not to them.

D. Rebuilding the walls and gates, Chapter 3

This chapter is filled with great spiritual lessons (see author's booklet, "The Gospel in the Gates of Jerusalem").

E. Nehemiah's response to opposition, Chapters 4–6

CHAPTER 4

W. 1-3–As the work progresses, the enemy continues to use the weapon of ridicule. They make light of the zeal of the workmen and laugh at their workmanship, saying that even a nimble fox could knock down the wall.

W. 4-6–Nehemiah ignores their sarcasm and prays to God, but continues to build.

W. 7-9–When the enemy sees that the wall is going up in spite of their ridicule, they become angry and decide to try to destroy the wall. Nehemiah continues to pray and build.

V. 10—Opposition comes next from within their own ranks—discouragement in the presence of the huge undertaking and the threat of the enemy making a surprise attack. Nehemiah arms the workmen.

V. 17—They work with one hand and hold a weapon with the other.

V. 23—Nehemiah injects a humorous note by adding that they did not take off their clothes during this trying experience—except, of course, when they took a bath!

CHAPTER 5—Opposition again rises from within their own ranks.

W. 1-5—Some of their own brethren take advantage of the hard lot of others and give “help” by taking mortgages at excessive interest and also by buying their sons and daughters into slavery. This display of covetousness is the same as the idolatry which sent them into captivity.

W. 6-11—Nehemiah is very angry when this is called to his attention, and he forces these greedy brethren to restore what they had taken.

V. 12—The brethren take an oath that they will restore what they had taken.

V. 13—Nehemiah threatens to deal with them severely if they do not carry through with their agreement.

W. 14-19—Nehemiah, on a leave of absence from his position as cup-bearer for King Artaxerxes, had refused to accept the salary formerly paid to the governor of Israel, which came from taxing the people. His example should have been an inspiration and example to his brethren.

CHAPTER 6—In spite of crafty opposition, the wall is finished.

W. 1-3—The enemies (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) hear that the wall is completed, but Nehemiah honestly admits the report is a bit exaggerated (the gates are not set up).

The enemy reverses the opposition. Since they could not stop the work, they now propose to get together with Nehemiah and work out a compromise. However, their intention is not to promote the welfare of Nehemiah. This is the satanic method of “when you can’t beat them, join them.” Today it is called the ecumenical movement.

Nehemiah properly turns it down and for the 14th time inserts the little word “so” that tells us much.

V. 4—The enemy approaches Nehemiah four times. It is interesting to note (v. 2) the name of the village where they proposed to meet—Ono. That is Nehemiah’s answer, “O, no!”

W. 5-7—On the fifth approach to Nehemiah, they insert a subtle pressure to force him to meet with them. They circulate a false report that Nehemiah is attempting to rebel against Persia and set up a separate state. Gashmu (the gossip) is spreading the report (v. 6).

V. 8—Nehemiah politely calls them liars.

W. 9-14—The enemy then hires false prophets to make Nehemiah and the people afraid.

W. 15-19—Without fanfare of trumpets, great ceremony or ribbon cutting, the wall is finished. The brief, expressive word “so” tells the story—“So the wall was finished” (v. 15).

The enemy still persists in its opposition by circulating letters to the nobles of Judah, as Tobiah had evidently married a daughter of one of the nobles.

F. Nehemiah's register of people, Chapter 7

W. 1-4—Nehemiah, having finished the wall, gives Hanani and Hanaiah charge of Jerusalem. He instructs them to keep the gates closed at certain times to prevent the enemy from entering. **“Eternal vigilance”** is the price of Christian liberty.

W. 5-73—This is a **repetition of the genealogy** given in Ezra 2. Unnecessary though this may seem to us, it is repeated because it is important to God and He challenges us to read it. “The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance” (Psalm 112:6). God never forgets the faithful. This chapter comes from the book of eternity.

II. REVIVAL and REFORM, Chapters 8–13

A. Great Bible reading led by Ezra, Chapter 8

Bible reading is essential to revival.

W. 1-6—Ezra stands upon a pulpit of wood before the water gate. (The Word of God is spiritual water.) Ezra reads in the Law of Moses from morning until noon.

W. 7, 8—Ezra evidently reads a portion and then the Levites, scattered in the crowd, explain it to the people. (Note: The method used here is still God’s method. The Word is to be read distinctly and explained so that the people can understand it.)

W. 9-12—Many people are overcome with emotion as they had never before heard the Word of God. They weep. Nehemiah urges the people not to weep but to rejoice. Here is the source of Christian strength, “for the joy of the LORD is your strength” (8:10). See also Philippians 4:13.

V. 13—Ezra instructs the teachers (Levites) in the law.

W. 14-18—The Feast of Tabernacles is observed.

B. Revival—the result, Chapters 9, 10

CHAPTER 9

W. 1-3—The ingredients and order of revival are important. Reading the Word of God (studying and understanding it) is essential and basic. Fasting, sackcloth, and ashes reveal their attitude and sincerity. Confession and worship follow.

W. 4-38—This is a great prayer of confession—praise and adoration of God as Creator (vv. 5, 6); praise and adoration because of His providential dealings with Israel; recitation and reminder of their long history. (Stephen recited this same history in Acts 7, but it led to murder, not to revival; to his condemnation, not to their confession.) Note the confession of their sins (vv. 34-38).

CHAPTER 10—The people make and sign a covenant to serve God.

C. Reform—another result, Chapters 11–13

CHAPTER 11—The rulers cast lots to see who is to dwell in Jerusalem and who is to live elsewhere in the land.

CHAPTER 12

W. 1-42—**Roster** of priests and Levites who had returned with Zerubbabel.

W. 43-47—**Restoration** of sacrifices and temple worship. (Notice the joy of the people.)

CHAPTER 13—Nehemiah, who had returned to Persia, comes again to Jerusalem and institutes reforms.

W. 1-5—The reading of the law leads to separation.

W. 6-9—Nehemiah puts Tobiah out of the apartment he had been given in the temple.

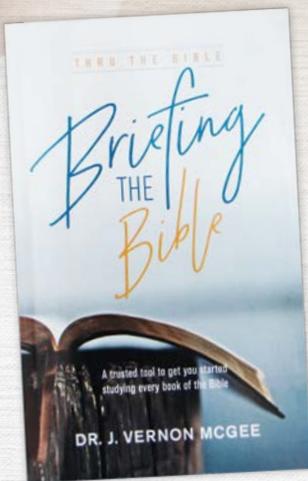
W. 10-14–The Levites had not been paid. Nehemiah forces the rulers to see that the Levites receive their portion.

W. 15-22–The Sabbath day is observed. Men of Tyre bring fish to sell in Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. Nehemiah forces them to leave and orders the gates of Jerusalem to be closed on the Sabbath.

W. 23-31–Intermarriage among the heathen is still practiced. Nehemiah uses extreme means (v. 25) to force them not to intermarry. (Verse 28 would be humorous if it were not so serious.)

Note the humility and dedication of Nehemiah in his desire to please and to serve God (vv. 14, 31).

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