

NAME

The word "Nehemiah" means "Jehovah comforts" or "consolation." This is the name of the main character and probably the author.

AUTHOR

The fact that the narrative is written in the first person singular in many places is evidence that the book was written by Nehemiah himself. The greater part of it was probably initially written in the form of letters or reports to the Emperor Artaxerxes I (Ahasuerus), from whom he had received a leave of absence. This could also help account for certain places where he is mentioned in the third person (Nehemiah 8:9; 10:1; 12:26,47).

About Nehemiah:

- He was born in exile (maybe in a royal house) and in his early manhood became attached to the Persian Court.
- He was a layman who received appointment as governor of Jerusalem and surrounding Judah
- He was a cupbearer to Araxerxes I (Ahasuerus)
- He was a true patriot who sought the religious welfare of the state (Nehemiah 5:18)
- He had respect for Divine law and respect for the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:18)
- He made devout acknowledgment of God in all things (Nehemiah 1:11; 2:18)
- He had a practical perception of God's character (Nehemiah 1:5; 9:9-33)
- He combined watchfulness and prayer (Nehemiah 4:9-20)
- He showed humility in ascribing all good in himself to the grace of God (Nehemiah 2:12; 7:5)
- He was firm as a reformer
- He is not to be confused with the Nehemiah who returned from the exile to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2)

The Role of Prayer in Nehemiah's Life

- Constant prayer / unending - there are 3 months of prayer between chapters 1 and 2
- Confidence in God's provision and protection
- Always began with prayer
- Prayer was accompanied by planning - he was a man of prayer and action
- Always prayed that he would be available for the Lord to use him

Comparison Between Nehemiah and Ezra

- Nehemiah was a civil reformer / Ezra was a religious reformer
- Nehemiah reorganized society / Ezra reorganized the priesthood
- Both labored hard to bring back the Jews to the law of God

DATE

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther complete the 17 historical books of the Old Testament. These three books actually record the post-captivity (i.e. post-exilic) period of Hebrew history as they record God's dealings with His people after their going into captivity. The prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi also belong to this period. Ezra and Nehemiah deal with remnant returning from the captives to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah covers a period of about 12 years - roughly from 446 B.C. to 434 B.C. It takes up the history of the Jews about 11 or 12 years after the close of the book of Ezra. Fourteen years after the

return of Ezra to Jerusalem, Nehemiah led up a company and restored the walls and the civil authority. Following the completion of the walls, Nehemiah and Ezra work together to bring much needed reforms among the returned remnant. Artaxerxes I (Ahasueras) issued his decree c. 445 B.C. and Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem in 444 B.C.

THEME

See Halley: Jerusalem During the Days of Nehemiah (page 278)

Type of Literature: History & Government

Halley (page 43): Rebuilding Jerusalem

Mitchell: Reconstruction Thru Prayer and Work

Nehemiah had a good government job with a secure future. However, hearing of the plight of God's people, he became concerned. He as a layman prayerfully placed himself at God's disposal and God used him mightily.

Don't ever let a supposed lack of ability or training by your excuse for not being used of God. Someone has well said, *"Prayer pains, and perseverance are the conditions of successful work for God!"*

Kartozian: The book of civil conditions upon the return from Babylon

(WCBS Notes): The theme again is the faithfulness of Jehovah to fulfill His promises and the constant tendency of the people to defection.

Key Words (Kartozian): Prayer (Nehemiah 1:4 / Works (Nehemiah 2:17,18)

Key Word (Nelson's): Walls - while Ezra deals with the religious restoration of Judah, Nehemiah is primarily concerned with Judah's political and geographical restoration. The first seven chapters are devoted to the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, because Jerusalem was the spiritual and political center of Judah. Without walls, Jerusalem could hardly be considered a city at all.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God" (Nehemiah 6:15,16).

"They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 9 - The key to the Old Testament is the covenant, which is its theme and unifying factor. Israel's history can be divided according to the nation's obedience or disobedience to God's conditional covenant: blessings from obedience and destruction from disobedience. Nehemiah 9 records that upon completion of the Jerusalem wall the nation reaffirmed its loyalty to the covenant.

Setting:

Mitchell

This book is largely autobiographical, and is the last of the historical books chronologically. The Old Testament goes no further. When the book of Nehemiah closes there is silence so far as inspired history is concerned for nearly 400 years. There are no miracles, no prophets, no voice from heaven. The incidents recorded in Nehemiah are the last historical events in the Old Testament.

Nehemiah centers our attention on the reconstruction of the fortified city and the establishment of civil authority. Thus Nehemiah is more secular than Ezra, which was concerned primarily with the erection of the Temple.

Some Results of the Captivity

- It cured the Jews of idolatry. Hence the returned to Palestine they abhorred idols. No matter how blind they became in other respects they never again worshipped idols.
- The restoration did not set Israel in the place that she had lost. The Ark was not in the Temple. There was no national independence. They were subject to the Persians, Greeks, and the Romans who finally led them again into exile. From the return from Babylon to the appearing of the Messiah we read of no miracle or miraculous intervention of God.

Facts About the Book

- It is the last historical book of the Jews. After Nehemiah Judea remained subject to Persia for nearly 100 years. Then they were subject to Greece and Rome. It was during the Roman rule that Jesus was born.
- Unlike the book of Ezra, Nehemiah is written entirely in Hebrew.
- The book gives an account of the improvements in the city of Jerusalem and of the reformation among the people which were carried on by Nehemiah. In Nehemiah 6:15 is recorded the statement that the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was accomplished in 52 days.
- Due to Persian influence, Nehemiah refers to God always as "God of Heaven" and not as the "God of Israel" or the "God of Our Fathers" (see Nehemiah 1:4, etc.).
- In Nehemiah 8:4 we find the only reference in the Bible to a pulpit.
- Malachi the prophet of this period.

Similarities of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

- Both books begin at Babylon and end at Jerusalem
- Both center around the man of God who wrote it
- Both accounts begin with a Persian king's decree
- Both tell of building as their chief theme

Final Thoughts on Theme & Setting

The completion of the wall brought fear and discouragement to Nehemiah's enemies. It was evident that the completion was an act of God (Nehemiah 6:6). Their dejection proves the evil in their hearts as they were unwilling to rejoice in what was clearly an act of God and the success of the godly. The completion of the walls also becomes a reminder of Israel's past glory as a servant of God.

Outline:

- I. Rebuilding the Wall 1-7 (The wall is rebuilt by Nehemiah)
 - Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem
 - Building of the wall is commenced
 - Building of the wall is opposed
 - Building of the wall is completed
- II. Revival and Reform 8:1-13:3 (The covenant is renewed by Ezra)
 - Moses' Law is read at the Feast of Trumpets
 - The Covenant is recalled and renewed
 - The cities of Judah are re-populated
 - The city wall is dedicated
- II. Rectifying the Wrong 13:4-31 (The later reform under Nehemiah)
 - Temple reforms
 - Sabbath reforms
 - Social reforms

RECIPIENTS

God's people - specifically the post-exilic Hebrews...and us.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Some basic observations / applications:

1. Sanballat and Tobiah have nothing positive to say concerning Nehemiah's work project. Three principles can be seen in this:
 - Scoffers are only an encouragement to scoffers
 - Doing God's will will bring opposition
 - Under opposition always turn to God in prayer
2. The prayer of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:8) teaches us that the purposes of God may sometimes be delayed (according to our reckoning) but God is true to His word and never abandons them. God did remember His people and brought them back (compare with Jeremiah 29:10-13).
3. The complaining listed in chapter 5 is sad commentary on the Jewish nation which is also typical of the Christian church. Consider:
 - Ministry is often sacrificed for personal gain
 - There was a sad lack of compassion for the poor. Anything less than compassion for the poor is a slap in the face of God.
4. God is unchanging - however God does not always choose to operate in the same way (there are no spectacular miracles in Ezra and Nehemiah and yet God is clearly at work).
5. Prayer and Perseverance overcome persecution

(From WCBS Notes):

- Ezra and Nehemiah continues the history of Israel where the Chronicles left off.
- The book of Ezra shows the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy of return after 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).
- The book of Nehemiah gives the date of the building of the wall, at which point the 70 weeks of Daniel begin.
- Ezra-Nehemiah extend from the year of the beginning of Daniel's second Gentile world empire (Media-Persia) to the end of that empire (539-330 B.C.).
- Nehemiah gives the historic background for Malachi and together they complete the canon and set the stage for the 400 years of silence prior to the appearance of John the forerunner of Messiah.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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