

NEHEMIAH

Introduction

Since Pastor Greg gave an excellent historical context of Israel from the Pentateuch to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, I am not going to repeat that here, but refer you to his work on pp.254-256 of the Historical section of the Old Testament Survey study.

Nehemiah means Yahweh comforts. Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, a Persian ruler. A cupbearer was not a butler, but an individual who tasted the King's food and wine before it was given to the king to prevent the king from being poisoned. So, there was potential risk of being killed performing his duty. He had to be a trusted individual and often was a confidant to the king, who was often asked to give advice.

Nehemiah recounts selected events of Nehemiah's leadership. Ezra and Nehemiah are combined as one book in the Hebrew canon of Scripture. None of the New Testament writers ever quoted from the book of Nehemiah. The author is unknown, and some scholars believe that the Chronicler of I and II Chronicles wrote both Ezra and Nehemiah, and John MacArthur thinks that Ezra wrote both books. The time of the events of Nehemiah begins in 446 BC, the 20th year of Artaxerxes (464 BC-423 BC) and Nehemiah 13 possibly around 424 BC. One of the key characters in Nehemiah is Sanballat, who was the Governor of Samaria at that time.

"The Jewish community was struggling to maintain its identity as the people of the Lord, were insecure, and facing severe moral and religious challenges." ESV Study Bible Nehemiah rebuilt the city wall to protect Jerusalem from attack.

Some of the themes of Nehemiah include: spiritual revival, opposition, the Lord's protection and providence, need for faithfulness, the Lord hears and answers prayer, worship, be on guard against moral weakness, Nehemiah's initiative and hard work, and God's restoration of His people.

General Outline

- I. **Cup Bearer 1:1-2:10**
 - A. **Personal Life 1:1-4**
 - B. **Prayer Life 1:5-11**
 - C. **Professional Life 2:1-10**
- II. **Builder 2:11—6:10**
 - A. **Preparation 2:7-9**
 - B. **Evaluation 2:1-16**
 - C. **Exhortation 2:17-10**

D. Participation 3:1-32

E. Persecution 4:1-6:14

III. Governor 7:1-13:31

A. Recruiting the Leaders 7:1-3

B. Registering the People 7:4-73

C. Reviewing the Covenant 8:1-10:39

D. Reforming the Nation 11:1-13:39

Survey of Nehemiah

I. Cupbearer

A. Personal Life—Facing the Situation 1:1-4

1. Identifying himself 1:1

- a. “Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah”
- b. Time: “in the month of Chislev, the 20th year”
- c. Location: “Susa the capital”

2. Inquiring of the conditions 1:2,3

- a. He asked: “Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and remain from the captivity and about Jerusalem.”
- b. He listened: “They said to me, The remnant there in the province who remain from the captivity are in great calamity and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gated are burned with fire.”

3. Identifying with their Condition 1:4

- a. He wept: “when I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days”
- b. He fasted and prayed: “I was fasting and praying before the God of Heaven.”
Application: When interacting with others we should ask questions about their welfare, carefully listen to what they say, identify with their condition, and pray.

B. Prayer Life—Facing the Sovereign 1:5-11

1. He raised praise to the Sovereign 1:5

- a. His attributes
 - 1.) His Person: “O Yahweh, the God of Heaven”
 - 2.) His Power: “great and fearsome God”
- b. His Actions
 - 1.) “He preserves the covenant”—His promise
 - 2.) “He preserves lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep his commandments.

2. He rendered penitence to the Sovereign 1:6-7

- a. Sinners/offenders: Israel, Nehemiah's family, Nehemiah himself 1:6
- b. Sins/offences 1:7
 - 1.) Commission: "we have worked utter destruction against you"
 - 2.) Omission: "and not kept the commandments... you commanded Moses"

3. He recalled a promise from the Scripture 1:8-10

- a. Disobey/Departure "(if) you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples' 1:8
- b. Repent/Return "(if) you return to Me and keep My commandments...I will bring them to the place I have chosen" 1:9

4. He requested petitions of the Sovereign 1:11

- a. Supplication—"may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of your slave"
- b. Success—"make Your slave successful today"
- c. Sensitivity—"grant him compassion before this man"

Application: We can follow Nehemiah' example in prayer by including praise, Confession, remembering God's promises, and making petitions in our prayers.

C. Professional Life—Facing the Supervisor 2:1-6

1. Position—"Now I was the cupbearer to the King Artaxerxes" 1:11, 2:1

2. Performance

- a. Performed his task—faithful but was sad and the King asked why, and he said his city lies in waste and its gates have been consumed by fire.
- b. Prayed to God—faith: "so I prayed to the God of heaven"
- c. Petitioned the King: "send me to Judah to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

II. Builder

A. Preparation 2:7-10

1. Nehemiah requested letters for permission to the governors.
2. Nehemiah requested letters for provisions: Temple, wall, his house.

B. Evaluation—inspected Jerusalem's walls. 2:11-16

1. He did not rush: "was there 3 days" 11
2. He did not go alone—"a few men with me" 12
3. He did not tell the whole group—he did not tell anyone what he was planning 12, 16
4. He did not delegate this evaluation to anyone
5. He did not do a careless job—through inspection 13-16

C. Exhortation 17-20

1. He identified with the problem— "we" 17
2. He acknowledged the situation honestly—"you see the calamity we are in" 17

3. He encouraged a solution—“let us rebuild the wall” 17 (he was part of the solution)
4. Response of the people—“let us arise and build” 18
5. Response of the enemies—“they mocked us and despised us” 19
6. Reaction of Nehemiah—he rebuked them 20

D. Participation 3:1-32

1. People: high priest, priests, goldsmiths, perfumers, officials, daughters, Levites, Temple servants, merchants.
2. Places: Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Meronoth, Mizpah, Jerusalem, Beth-haccerem, Beth-Zur, Kielah, men of valley, Ophel, Trans-euphraties, Bethlehem

E. Persecution 4:1-6:14

1. Criticism from the outside 4:1-6

- a. Initial opposition: Sanballat the Horonite (Governor of Sumaria) 1-2 and Tobiah the Ammonite 3-4
- b. Initial reaction from Nehemiah 5-6
 - 1.) Spoke to God 5 “Hear, O God, for we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads, and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity...for they have vexed the builders”
 - 2.) Stayed the work 6 “So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its (height) and the people had a heart to work”

2. Conspiracy from the outside 4:7-9

- a. Intensified opposition: Sanballat, Tobiah, Arabs, Ammonites, Ashdodites “joined together to come and fight against Jerusalem and cause a disturbance” 1-3
- b. intensified reaction: Nehemiah prayed, persevered: “Hear, O our God, for we are “despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in In a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity...they have vexed the builders 4-5 So we built the wall...and the people had a heart to work 6

3. Constraint from the inside 4:1-23

- a. Circumstances bringing discouragement 1-9
- b. Cause of discouragement 10-11
 - 1.) Loss of strength—“strength of burden bearers is failing” 10
 - 2.) Loss of vision—“yet there is much rubble” 10
 - 3.) loss of confidence—“we were unable to build the wall” 10
 - 4.) Loss of security—“they will not know or see until we come upon them” 11-12
- c. Cure of discouragement 13-22
 - 1.) Unify efforts to one goal—“I had men stand in the lowest parts...I had people stand by families with swords, spears, bows” 13.
 - 2.) Direct attention to the Lord—“remember the Lord” 14a
 - 3.) Balance—build/battle: half Nehemiah’s men built and half had weapons

- And the builders carried load in one hand and weapons in the other 14b-20
- 4.) Rallying point “whatever place you hear...the trumpet, there gather together to us. Our God will fight for us.” 19-20
- 5.) Serve others 21-23 “they may be a guard for us by night and a worker by day”

4. Complaints from the inside 5:1-19

- a. Problems 1-5 “great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers”

1.) Food to feed the family 2 “let us get grain that we may eat and live”

2.) Fields—pay mortgage 3 “we are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses, that we might get grain because of the famine”.

3.) Finances—borrow money and sell children 4-5 “we have borrowed money for the king’s tax...we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves...our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

- b. Prescription 6-13

1.) Response of Nehemiah 6-9

a.) Compassion of anger 6 “I was very angry when I heard their outcry”

b.) Consulted with himself 7 “I consulted within my own heart”

c.) Contended with the nobles and officials 10-11 “I contended with the nobles and officials...You are exacting usury...now would you also sell your brothers that they may be sold to us? Then they were silent and could not find a word (to say)

2.) Requirements from Nehemiah

a.) Remit usury 10 “Please, let us forsake this usury”

b.) Return property 11 “Please give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses”

c.) Restore interest taken 11 give back the money you are exacting

3.) Reaction of the nobles—“we will do exactly what you saying”

4.) Reassurance with a promise 12-13 “I called the priests and made them Swear that they would do according to this word”. Then the people did according to this word.

- c. Prevention 14-19

1.) Nehemiah refrained from taking the governor’s allowance 14,15,18

2.) Nehemiah remained at the task of building the wall 16

3.) Nehemiah restocked food supplies 17, 18

4.) Nehemiah prayed that he would be remembered for good. 19

5. Compromise from the outside 6:1-14

- a. Personal request for a meeting 1-4 “Sanballat and Greshem...come let us meet together at Chephirim...but they were planning to do me harm”. 2
Nehemiah’s response: “I am doing a great work and cannot come down”
They sent messages four times and Nehemiah responded the same way
- b. Public announcement of rebellion 5-9 “It is heard among the nations... that you and the Jews are planning to rebel...and you are to be their king” 6
Nehemiah’s response: “Such words as you are saying have not been done, but you are devising them in your own heart” 8
- c. Prophecy of harm coming to Nehemiah 10-14 “Shemaiah...for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming at night”.

F. Completion of the project 6:15-19

- 1. Time: 52 days 15**
- 2. Result: Enemies lost confidence 16 “when our enemies heard...their confidence fell”**
- 3. Reason: Recognized God’s help 16 “it was from our God that this work had been accomplished”**
- 4. Reports: Communication continues 17-19 “many letters went from the Nobles of Judah to Tobiah and Tobiah to them. Then Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid.” 17, 19**

III. Governor 7-13

A. Recruit leaders 7:1-3

- 1. Appointed laborers: gatekeepers, singers, Levites 1**
- 2. Appointed leaders: Hanani (brother) and Hananiah (commander-fortress) 2-3**

B. Recorded the people and their gifts 7:4-73

C. Renew the Covenant 8:1-10:39

1. Reading of the Law 8:1-8

- a. Place: Watergate 3 “at the square...in front of the Water Gate”
- b. Personnel 1, 4, 7
 - 1.) Ezra the Scribe 1
 - 2.) 14 Leading men 4
 - 3.) Levites 7
- c. Proclamation 3-8
 - 1.) What--Book of the Law 1, 5
 - 2.) When--Early morning to midday 3 “on the 1st day of the 7th month 2
 - 3.) How--Read and translated 8

2. Response of the people 1-8

- a. All gathered—“all the people” 1

- b. All attentive—“the people were attentive to the book of the law” 3
- c. All stood up—“all the people stood up” 5
- d. All answered—“all the people answered ‘Amen, Amen!’” 6
- e. All worshipped—“they bowed low and worshipped Yahweh” 6

3. Repentance of the people 8:9-12

- f. All crying—“all the people were weeping...heard the words of the law” 9
- g. All were calmed—“the Levites quieted the people” 11
- h. All celebrated—“the people went away...to celebrate” 12

4. Revival of the people 8:13-18

a. Pursuit of wisdom/insight 13-15

- 1.) It takes time—not in one day “on the second day” 13 “he (Ezra) read from the book of the law of God daily...seven days” 18
- 2.) It takes people—teacher (Ezra) 13
- 3.) It takes a right attitude—“gain insight...of the law 13
- 4.) It takes the right source—“words of the law” 13
- 5.) It takes the right response—obedience: observed the Feast of Booths 15-18

b. Products of wisdom/insight 16-17

- 1.) Personal effort 16-17a “made booths”
- 2.) Willingness to change 17b Israel had not done since Joshua
- 3.) Great rejoicing 17c “there was exceeding great gladness”

c. Prayer of the Levites 9:1-39

1.) Preparation for prayer 1-4

- a.) Humbled themselves—“gathered with fasting, in sackcloth, with dirt upon them” 1
- b.) Confessed sin 2 “confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers”
- c.) Read God’s Word 3 “read from the book of the Law”
- d.) Worshipped 3 “worshipping Yahweh their God”

2.) Prayer 4-38

- a.) Looking up: adoration and praise 5b-6 for His attributes and His actions in creation
- b.) Looking back: reflection and thanksgiving 7-31 for choosing Abraham, deliverance from Egypt, direction and provision in the wilderness, giving them the Law, forgiveness of sins, possession of the promised land, sending prophets, captivity as judgement for rejecting Him, not bringing complete destruction of the nation.

c.) Looking at: petition and confession 32-37 petition to relieve hardship and great distress and confession of the sins of their forefathers and their sins.

Application: This example of a pattern of prayer is one we can follow.

d. Promise with a covenant 9:38-10:39

1.) Purpose 9:38 “Now because of all this we are cutting an agreement in writing and on the sealed document (are the names of) our princes, our Levites, our Priests”

2.) People 10: 1-27 List of all the people who signed the document.

3.) Promises 10:28-39

a.) Follow God’s written Word 28,29 “the rest of the people...are entering into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law... and to keep and to do all the commandments of Yahweh”

b.) Home: no mixed marriage 30 “we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons”

c.) Society 31

(1.) Observe the Sabbath Day “the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will the receive from them on the sabbath or a holy day”

(2.) Observe the Sabbatical year “we will forego (the crops) the seventh year and the exaction of every debt”

d.) Place of worship 32-39

(1.) Shekel 32-33 “give yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God”

(2.) Wood 34 “supply of wood...to bring it to the house of our God”

(3.) First fruits 35-36 “to bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of Yahweh annually...and the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle...our herds...our flocks

(4.) Storehouse 37-39 the people promise to give their tithes of produce to the Levites who receive them and the “Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse”.

The first fruit contribution was to provide for the Levites

and the tenth of the tithe the Levites gave was to provide for the Priests.

D. Repopulate the cities 11:1-36

1. Jerusalem—people 1-22

- a. By lot 1 “the officials of the peoples lived in Jerusalem, but the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem while nine-tenths in the cities”
- b. Volunteered to move into the city 2 some “freely offered to live in Jerusalem”
- c. List of those who lived in Jerusalem 3-9
- d. Worked within the Temple (priests) in Jerusalem 10-14
- e. Worked outside the Temple (Levites) in Jerusalem and other cities 15-24

2. Other cities and towns inhabited 25-36

E. Record the Priests and Levites who returned with Jerubbabel 12:1-26

F. Rededicate the wall 12:27-47

1. Dedication of the wall 27-43

- a. Preliminary factors 27-30 Levites were sought out from all their places, singers were gathered, “the priests and Levites cleansed themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall.”
- b. Procedures 31-42 leaders and 2 great choirs go up on the wall from 2 directions and meet in the Temple area.
- c. Praises 43 The singers and the people rejoiced and were heard from far away.

2. Dedication of the priests, Levites, and people 44-47 The priests and Levites fulfilled their responsibilities, and the people gave to support their ministry.

F. Reform practices 13:1-31

1. Remove all foreigners 1-3 “...they read from the book of Moses...that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God...So when they heard the law, they separated all foreigners from Israel”

2. Restored the priesthood 4-14

- a. Removed Tobiah 4-9 While Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem, “in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes...I went to the King”, “Eliashib the priest, who was put over the chambers of the house of God, being related to Tobiah (an Ammonite), prepared a large room for him” that had been used for a storehouse in the Temple. When

Nehemiah returned and discovered what had happened, he removed Tobiah's possessions, had the room cleansed and returned the proper items to that room.

b. Restored Levites and Singers support 10-14 The Levites and the singers did not receive their support, so Nehemiah contended against the officials, then "all Judah brought the tithe of grain, new wine, and oil to the storehouses". and appointed men to oversee the storehouses.

c. Replaced Eliashib 13 Nehemiah replaced Eliashib with men he appointed.

3. Re-establish the Sabbath 15-22

a. Nehemiah observed some working on the sabbath (15) and foreigners selling merchandise on the sabbath (16).

b. He contended with the nobles of Judah 17-18

c. He stopped the selling of merchandise on the sabbath 19-21

d. He instructed "the Levites that they should cleanse themselves and come as gatekeepers to keep the sabbath day holy."

4. Reinstated pure marriage 23-31

a. People 23-27 Nehemiah observed that some of the Jews had married women of foreign countries. He contended with them and "made them swear by God, you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take up their daughters for your sons or for yourselves". He pointed to Solomon who sinned because of foreign women.

b. Priesthood 28-31 Even some of the priests married foreign women, "one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite (governor of Samaria), so I made him flee away from me." "Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign and that their responsibilities stood for the priests and Levites, each in his work."

c. Prayed 31 "Remember me, O my God, for good."