

Nehemiah

Introduction of Nehemiah.

This book must be read with Ezra to understand the situations and the events leading to Nehemiah's involvement.

Nehemiah's prayer is answered.

[Nehemiah 2:1-8](#).

Most of the text is written in the first person indicating that it was probably written personally by Nehemiah. In the few places where it appears to be written by someone else the text is also referring to other people, see [Nehemiah 8:9](#); [Nehemiah 10:1](#); [Nehemiah 12:26,47](#). These passages refer to the position of Nehemiah and at the time of writing was not in that position, possibly retired.

Background.

Artaxerxes 1, who became king in 457 B.C. and had Nehemiah as his cupbearer, was the son of Ahasuerus who had taken Esther as his queen. (*this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia*), [Esther 1:1](#).

Ezra had lead a group of Jews back to Jerusalem with the encouragement of king Artaxerxes 1. As a result they were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, this caused problems "*Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.*" [Ezra 4:4,5](#).

They wrote to Artaxerxes who commanded the work to stop because previous Jewish kings had caused problems for his nation. It was this instruction that caused Nehemiah to turn to God in prayer.

The Book of Nehemiah covers a period of about twenty years, Ezra and Nehemiah activities overlap during this period, it is also possible that Malachi made his prophecies during this period as a number of the evil activities of the people are recorded in the book of Nehemiah.

Outline of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. [Nehemiah 1:1 to 2:20](#)

Nehemiah prays after receiving news of problems in Jerusalem. [Nehemiah 1:1-11](#).

Nehemiah's prayer is answered. [Nehemiah 2:1-8](#).

Nehemiah secretly surveys the walls of Jerusalem. [Nehemiah 2:9-20](#).

The walls are repaired. [Nehemiah 3:1 to 6:19](#).

The workers and the work. [Nehemiah 3:1-32](#).

Their enemies oppose the work. [Nehemiah 4:1-23](#).

Nehemiah issues instructions. [Nehemiah 5:1-19](#).

The work on the wall is completed. [Nehemiah 6:1 to 7:4](#).

New reforms in Jerusalem which affect the Religious laws and people.

The Jews who returned with Zerubbabel. [Nehemiah 7:5-73](#).

The Law is read and obeyed. [Nehemiah 8:1-18](#).

The people confess. [Nehemiah 9:1 to 10:39](#).

List of people living in Jerusalem. [Nehemiah 11:1 to 12:26](#).

Dedication of the walls and Temple services. [Nehemiah 12:27-47](#).

Nehemiah final acts. [Nehemiah 13:1-30](#).

Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem.

[Nehemiah 1:1 to 2:20](#).

Nehemiah is identified as the son of Hachaliah, the name has the meaning of "The Lord has comforted". As a cupbearer he was in a position of great responsibility, at each meal he had to test the wine offered to the king to ensure that it had not been poisoned, this meant that he had easy access to the king, Nehemiah, as a Jew in this position shows how much trust the king had in him.

Being so close to the king meant that he could have considerable influence for good or bad. We can see the hand of God in this arrangement, the Jews had been allowed to return from exile in Babylon, to their own land over a century previous, some of Nehemiah's family could have returned but had chosen to remain in the palace. God needed a person to carry out His plans and Nehemiah was now in such a position, God always prepares His workers and puts them in the right place for the task.

The brother of Nehemiah, Hanani, with others, returns from a visit to Jerusalem and report the terrible state of the city and its people, this message was to have a major effect on Nehemiah. We have to ask why Nehemiah had so much interest in a city and its people many hundreds of miles away, he was in a safe and comfortable post as the king's cupbearer, why care for the city which had turned away from God and been judged, *"For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how you are doing?"* [Jeremiah 15:5](#), Nehemiah was one of the tools of God who were to restore the people of God.

The news makes Nehemiah very sad and depressed *"I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven."* Nehemiah was now in the right place, in prayer and ready for instruction, for it was all part of the plan of God.

Nehemiah prays after receiving news of problems in Jerusalem.

[Nehemiah 1:1-11](#).

Nehemiah would have known that the city had been in ruins since the Babylonians had captured it and taken the people into exile, [2 Kings 25:1-21](#). About 50,000 Jews had been allowed to return 50 years later to repair the temple and city, see [Ezra chapters 1-6](#). The temple had been under repair for twenty years, no work had been done on the city defences, it was very open to attack.

In this book we find twelve prayers by Nehemiah, this is the first, see [Nehemiah 2:4](#); [Nehemiah 4:4,9](#); [Nehemiah 5:19](#); [Nehemiah 6:9,14](#); [Nehemiah 9:5ff](#); [Nehemiah 13:14,22,29,31](#).

"in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year," this would be December, 445 B.C. Nehemiah prayed for four months, ([Nehemiah 2:1](#)), he is asking God to protect those who have already returned to Palestine, for the city to survive it needs the spiritual protection by God.

His prayer starts with giving God His true title,

"Lord God of heaven, O great and awesome God," a God who will keep and control His promises and keep His promises, His Word and covenants.

See [2 Chronicles 36:22-23](#); [Ezra 1:1-2](#). This title is often used by Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel:-

[Ezra 5:11-12](#); [Ezra 6:9](#); [Ezra 7:12,21,23](#).

[Nehemiah 1:4,5](#); [Nehemiah 2:4,20](#).

[Daniel 2:18,19,44](#).

Much of the prayer of Nehemiah concerns a confession of sin, v6-9, using the word "we" to show that he was included, Nehemiah was claiming the promise that if you turn to Him and repent then forgiveness is available. Nehemiah used the word "remember," claiming the promises of God often in this book.

The prayer ends with a confidence that God will respond to the prayer, would release him from his post, and would then raise up the necessary people and facilities, v10,11.

Nehemiah's prayer is answered.

[Nehemiah 2:1-8](#).

Though Nehemiah was daily in the presence of the king he would not be expected to just put the problem to the king, the king must make the first move, (see [Mark 9:23](#); [Matt 17:20](#)). The month of Nison indicates about four months have passed since the Nehemiah time of prayer, it is possible that he also had a prayer time each day, but Nehemiah has had to wait patiently for God to act, [Heb 6:12](#).

Eventually the day comes when God chooses to take the next step, Nehemiah has been waiting faithfully for the opportunity to speak to the king. He is before the king, ready to taste the wine, as had been his job for a long time, but today the king notices that Nehemiah is bothered by something and asks what was the problem.

Nehemiah offers a very short instant prayer to the Lord, [Heb 4:16](#), any delay in Nehemiah replying would have concerned the king.

Nehemiah has great respect for the king and his position of power, he did not say "I'm going," he worked through and submitted to the king's authority, though he was doing the work of God.

v3 Nehemiah responded with a question, "Would you not feel sadness about the conditions of his city of

origin," this opened the interest of the king. Nehemiah had spent the four months in preparation of what he wanted and is now able to then explain the situation in his home country and requests permission of the king for him to journey to Jerusalem to carry out the repairs, he also asks for letters of authority to make the journey, to do the work without interference from local officials, (see [Ezra 4:1ff](#)) and to obtain the material needed to carry out the work. The king in [Nehemiah 5:14](#), indicates that he made Nehemiah governor of Judah.

King Artaxerxes also provides what Nehemiah requested and he is sent with an armed guard.

King Artaxerxes was not a believer in the true God but the Lord is able to work through unbelievers to fulfill His plan and Will. This has happened many times in the Biblical records, for example, the Egyptian Pharaoh involved in the story of Joseph, protected the people until many years later when another Pharaoh meets Moses, who has come to release His people from Egypt. Final thought, it was Caesar who issued the decree that sent Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem.

There is no record of Nehemiah making a prophecy or gave a message from God. The only action was to faithfully carry out the work God had given him, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

Note the prophecy given in [Daniel 9:24-27](#) which mentions the rebuilding of the city. God was using Nehemiah to prepare the city for the coming Messiah.

Nehemiah problems then secretly surveys the walls of Jerusalem.

[Nehemiah 2:9-20](#).

Nehemiah was a governor on official business, he had his armed guard and so would have caused much attention from the local nations. Two initial names are given as enemies of the Jews, Sanballat the Horonite, who was from a town about twelve miles from Jerusalem and Tobiah the Ammonite. Later in v19, we hear of the third enemy, Geshem, an Arabian. Sanballat had some kind of official position and that made him more dangerous, [Nehemiah 4:1-3](#), Sanballat seems to have control over the army of Samaria.

Tobiah the Ammonite came from a tribe which had been enemies of the Jews for some time, [Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#). Tobiah appears to have been married to a daughter of a Jewish family, [Nehemiah 6:17-19](#) and so would have friends amongst the Jews.

v11-16, Nehemiah soon realized that there were also enemies amongst the Jews themselves, so Nehemiah secretly surveyed the damage and work needed. This act also prevented Sanballat from knowing of his proposed repairs.

v17-20, Nehemiah told the people that God was at work with the restoring of the city, God had already prepared the way by working on the heart of the king Artaxerxes, to meet the needs of the work. This information now persuades the Jews that they take up the challenge and work. they did not remind Nehemiah that the work had been started and stopped once before. [Ezra 4:1ff](#). Note that God had raised up the new leader, Nehemiah from outside the locals, he would have a different way of looking at the situation and problems.

When Sanballat and friends heard of the work they accused the Jews of rebellion, not knowing that the king Artaxerxes had authorized it. They ridiculed the Jews, laughing at their plans, it had worked before, [Ezra 4:1ff](#). Consider [Isaiah 53:3](#); [Acts 2:13](#); [Acts 17:18](#); [Acts 26:24](#). Nehemiah made three points in response, the work was for God, He was with His people, His servants and Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem had no part in the work.

If God challenged you like He did Nehemiah, would you respond? Would you let Him lead you into a possible unknown challenge? Is God leading you or are you following your own plans? Read [1 Cor 15:58](#).

The walls are repaired.

Nehemiah 3:1 to 6:19

The walls of Jerusalem had been in a bad state of repair for a long time, it offered no protection to the Jewish inhabitants, they were content to live in this state, now Nehemiah sets them the challenge, repair the city to the glory of God.

The chapter lists those who were involved and what task Nehemiah had given them, forty-two groups are named and thirty-eight individuals by name. There are also many other workers not mentioned by Nehemiah, each was given his personal task, some had large tasks, others the section of the wall by their house.

The gates had been destroyed by fire, [Nehemiah 1:3](#); [Jeremiah 17:27](#), Nehemiah obtained wood from the forest of the king to rebuild the gates and replace the bolts and bars so they could be locked for protection. We must always make sure that we protect our lives and work from the Enemy, compare [2 John 8](#).

The workers and the work.

[Nehemiah 3:1-32](#).

The chapter mentions many different workers, the rulers, the priests, craftsmen, both men and women, even some from outside the city.

As the work was to fulfill the plans of God then we would have expected the priests to be at the front of the work, this included the high priest Eliashib. He was prepared to use his consecrated hands for the work of the Lord, see [1 Cor 10:31](#). The priests worked on the Sheep gate, this was the entrance used for the sacrifices. Unfortunately Eliashib caused Nehemiah problems, he became friends with the enemy, [Nehemiah 13:4-9](#). Eliashib's grandson had married a daughter of Sanballat, [Nehemiah 13:28](#).

[Nehemiah 3:5](#). Teknos was a small town about eleven miles from Jerusalem, some of the people from the town came to help, but sadly Nehemiah recorded that the *"nobles did not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord,"* what was so special about these "nobles?" Perhaps they did not want to get their hands dirty? Jesus was a carpenter, [Mark 6:3](#), Paul a tent maker [Acts 18:3](#).

The records show that others came from some distance to work, from Jericho, v2; from Gibeon and Mizpah, v7, they were probably risking their lives to carry out this work, their desire to work for the Lord was greater than the locals.

The record shows that some people asked for additional work after completing their first task, they then worked on "another " section, see [Nehemiah 3:11,19,21,24,27,30](#).

There are some interesting comments about the work:

The Sheep gate.

The temple was close by and so the animals for sacrifice came through this gate, it is the only gate that was "sanctified," dedicated to the use of God. There is no mention of the gate being fitted with a locking system.

The Fish Gate.

Merchants used this gate to bring in the fish caught in the Mediterranean Sea. It was also near the Towers of Hammeah and Hananeel, part of the city defence system.

The Old Gate.

Located at the North west corner of the city, also called the Corner Gate. This allowed access into the newer part of the city in Nehemiah's days.

The Valley Gate.

Located on the southwest corner, this gate with the Dung Gate, opened out to the Valley of Hinnom.

This valley had been involved with the worship Molech, [2 Chronicles 33:6](#). Later the valley had become the place for burning the corpses of law breakers and animals, then later to be used for the burning of rubbish, [2 Kings 23:10](#). The name has become associated with Hell, Gehenna.

The Dung Gate.

Located near the pool of Siloam on the southern side of the city, it was the main gate to the Valley of Hinnom.

The Fountain Gate.

Is found to the North of the Dung Gate, near the pool of Siloam. This also gave access to the old city of David and the Gihon spring, a source of water for the city.

The Water Gate.

Located near the Kidron Valley. There is no mention that this gate was repaired, just the wall on either side.

The Horse Gate.

Near to the temple, just north of the Water Gate.

The East Gate.

This gate led directly to the Temple, today it is known as the Golden Gate. It is believed this is the gate Jesus used on Palm Sunday. Today the gate is sealed up with stone blocks. The Glory of God departed the temple, [Ezekiel 10:16-22](#) through this gate and will return to the city the same way, [Ezekiel 43:1-5](#).

The Miphkad Gate, Often called the Hammiphkad gate, or inspection gate.

This was the most vulnerable gate to attack, so the army would be stationed nearby.

This work of repair needed the effort and work of many people under the leadership of Nehemiah. Consider [1 Cor 15:58](#).

Their enemies oppose the work.

[Nehemiah 4:1-23](#).

Sanballat and his associates were worried by the work of repairing the walls of Jerusalem, they really wanted to control the Jewish people for their wealth etc. This opposition by Satan, through Sanballat, to the work of God had the opposite effect, it encouraged the people to work.

In chapters 4 to 6 of Nehemiah we see a number of ways the enemy used in attempting to stop the work:- They made fun of their efforts, [Nehemiah 4:1-3](#).

This is often the first attack by the Enemy, but Nehemiah took the situation to God in prayer, v4,5. The world does not realize God often uses the "weak" to do His work. Note that Sanballat involved the worship of God in his insults. The wall was soon half way up.

Threat of war. [Nehemiah 4:7-10](#).

The Jews were surrounded by various nations controlled by the three leaders, Satan hates the Jews, the people of God and will do anything to destroy them. Consider [John 4:22](#). Nehemiah took the situation to God in prayer again, then set up a security watch system v9, each man carried a spear as well as a building tool. See [Eph 6:10-18](#). Unfortunately the extra work load caused problems, it is difficult to work all day and watch all night.

Fear, [Nehemiah 4:11-23](#).

"We are not able," a common result of losing faith in the power of God, the fear rose up in the tribe of Judah, it appears from [Nehemiah 6:17-19](#) and [Nehemiah 13:15-22](#) that the people of Judah had marriage relationships with the enemy and were more interested in wealth than worship.

Jews from outlying villages kept sending reports of surprise attacks by the enemy, possibly rumour's or lies.

Nehemiah paid no attention and continued the work, splitting the people into armed workers and guards. This showed that the Jews were prepared to fight anyone who threatened them.

Nehemiah tells the people to put their faith in God, [Nehemiah 4:14,20](#). God is stronger than any enemy and will carry out His plans for the future.

Nehemiah issues instructions.

[Nehemiah 5:1-19](#).

The Enemy had failed to stop the work now starts the next attack by using the Jews themselves, *selfishness*, "we are losing out," is the cry, Jew was exploiting Jew, even the women, who are normally silent, were joining in.

The complaints were from four different groups:-

1) Those who wanted food but had no land. They could not help themselves.

As the repairs were made it affected the population, food was becoming short, v3.

2) House owners who had mortgaged their homes to purchase their food.

As food became short the prices went up, people were getting into debt because of the inflation.

3) The taxes to the king of Persia were going up, some were having to borrow money to pay these.

The tax money went to the king and was not used locally.

4) Jews who were wealthy were taking advantage of the situation, they loaned money but use the borrowers home, land or children as security.

It was not lawful for a Jew to charge interest on a loan to another Jew. [Deuteronomy 23:19-20](#); [Exodus 22:25-27](#). There were also laws concerning any security needed for help, [Deuteronomy 24:1-13](#); [Leviticus 25:35-46](#).

The "year of the Jubilee," [Leviticus 25:1-17](#) was implemented by God to ensure all debts were forgiven, this limited the rich from becoming too rich at the expense of the poor.

Greed was one of the many sins that caused God to punish the Jews with the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah was very angry when he heard of the problems, he thinks about the situation and then calls the leaders and nobles to him where he points out their wrong, then he calls the people together and challenges

them about their national behaviour, reminding them that they had once been sold into slavery.

Nehemiah points out a number of facts to them:-

They were robbing their own Jewish families, not the Gentile enemy. Lending money was not wrong, see [Matt 25:27](#), as long as it was not against the Law of God. This is also important for Believers as they forget who supplies all their needs.

Their acts was putting their Jewish families into bondage just to get money, God had just redeemed them from Babylon, now they were putting their neighbour back to bondage for money.

God had wanted the Jews to be His witnesses to the world, [Isaiah 42:5,6,7](#), but this behaviour was having the opposite effect. Consider the thoughts in [1 Cor 6:1-11](#).

"Fear of God," this fear is not as a slave and master but with respect and love as a child with their parents, this means that the child needs to trust, honour, obey the words from their parents. It is this relationship that should exist between God and His people. To walk in fear is a walk of faith and trust.

v10,11. Nehemiah was lending money to help others but not charging interest, he was making a good example. The "hundredth part" suggests the level of interest being charged by others, it indicates that the yearly interest was about 12 percent.

v12,13. The Lord's judgement if they fail to obey. Nehemiah makes them take an oath in the presence of the priests and others. Their agreement was between the people and also between God and themselves.

Nehemiah demands they repent and restore. The action of shaking his clothes was a Jewish act of condemnation, similar to shaking dust off of their feet. [Matt 10:14](#); [Acts 13:51](#); [Acts 18:6](#).

The people respond with the word "Amen" which has the meaning "so be it," an agreement with all that has been said, an act of worship, for God to act as necessary.

A Perfect example; [Nehemiah 5:14-19](#)

Nehemiah's first and second period as governor were good examples, here he shows that he had not used his position for gain, but for the people. Read and consider the remarks of Jesus in [Matt 20:25-28](#); [Mark 10:42-45](#); [Luke 22:23-30](#) and Paul in [1 Cor 9:1ff](#), especially note v14, "*for the labourer is worthy of his wages.*".

v16-19 Nehemiah and his friends also feed others and helped in the building of the wall. He lived and worked to please the Lord. Nehemiah knew that one day he would be judged on his work by God as a leader and he was willing to wait for the examination and words from the Lord.

It was now the time to get back to work on the wall but the enemy still had many tricks to use to stop the work.

The work on the wall is completed.

[Nehemiah 6:1 to 7:4](#).

The walls have now been repaired, now the gates need replacing or repaired and the fellowship of the people restored.

The opposition by Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of the enemies had failed to stop the work, now they decide to destroy Nehemiah or make up false stories which would effect his control, once this had been done they could move into the city, helped by any of their secret supporters, v17-19.

The aim was to cause fear in Nehemiah and the Jews, [Nehemiah 6:9, 13-14,19](#). The first try involved an invitation to meet with them as an act of friendship, half way between Jerusalem and Samaria, but Nehemiah knew that they only meant him harm and responded with "*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?*" Satan often uses a similar trick to stop the Lord's work, getting unbelievers to distract a believer from the work the Lord has given him, they can even apparently join in the work to do this. If Satan can stop a Christian leader from being in control and supervising then the whole ministry may fail. Read and consider [1 Cor 11:13-15](#); [1 Cor 10:1-17](#) and [Acts 21:10-40](#), [2 Cor 6:14-17](#).

This does not mean that a leader must never move on but must also be open to the **leading of the Lord** into another ministry, if it is His will.

Sanballat sent the request four times, Nehemiah responded each time with the same message, so now Sanballat sends a letter which was not sealed so anyone could read it, the letter contained accusations and lies, "you and the Jews plan to rebel, that you may be their king." it continues, "there is already a king of Judah, we are going to tell on you!!!!" The letter is hinting that there was a Jewish revolt starting before the work, see [Nehemiah 2:19](#) and Nehemiah was planning to become king. This action by the enemy is

common, see [Matt 27:1,11-14](#); [Mark 15:1-5](#); [Luke 23:1-5](#); [John 18:28-38](#), [Matt 12:22-37](#); [Luke 11:14-23](#). This charge would be considered very serious in Nehemiah's time, The Persian kings were not prepared to have any opposition to their rule, any threat would be rapidly and violently dealt with, and end the work in Jerusalem.

The use of an "open letter" to a royal appointed governor would be considered very insulting, using the words like *"It is reported"* can cause suspicion without proof, it would make people have doubts about Nehemiah. Satan often uses this way of attacking the ministries and churches, to split the organization. Nehemiah made the right action, he denied then took the problem to God to sort out.

A threat from within. [Nehemiah 6:10-14](#).

Shemaiah the son of Delaiah was a secret follower of the enemy and made a plan to trap Nehemiah and then kill him. "let us take cover together in the temple where we will be safe, if he had access to the temple then he was a priest of some sort. Nehemiah knew it was a hoax, fake and *"I perceived that God had not sent him at all,"*. Nehemiah was a leader who would never hide, he was a true leader.

If Nehemiah had gone passed the altar of burnt offering in the temple then he would have been put to death, [Numbers 18:7](#), see also [2 Chronicle 26:16-21](#), action by God.

Nehemiah therefore knew that Shemaiah was not the messenger from God as the message was against the commands of God. See Deuteronomy 13:1-5. Always consider any messenger, sermon preached, "is it according to the Word of God?"

v14. Unfortunately, it appears that there was problems with some of the "prophets," but Nehemiah knew he was following the commands of God and left it in His hands.

The enemy does not give up. [Nehemiah 6:15-19](#).

The work and repairs was done in fifty two days, v15, this sent the message to the surrounding nations was that it was through the power of God, the impossible had been done. But just because the work was finished this did not stop the work of the enemy, neither will Satan stop the attack on a person, church or ministry just because the work had been completed, [Luke 4:13](#) *"Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time."*, "Watch out for Satan at work and always pray."

The Jews who were secretly helping the enemy were from the tribe of Judah, the tribe should have had a great interest in the "city of David, [Genesis 49:8-10](#), and also read [2 Samuel 7:1ff](#), it was through the Tribe of Judah that the Messiah was to come, their action was against the Will of God.

Why were they behaving like this? Many letters had been exchanged between Tobiah and the Men of Judah, and a marriage relationship had occurred, against the instruction of God. The letters from Tobiah were full of flattery for the Jewish leaders and lies about Nehemiah, and were believed. The Jews preferred to trust an enemy more than their "own Jewish brother".

It is worth noting that for a True Christian Jesus puts the earthly relationships second to God, [Matt 10:34-39](#), the Blood of Christ is greater than earth relationships.

Sadly, not only did they take instruction from Tobiah but also told him everything Nehemiah did and said, probably hoping for a great reward when Nehemiah was removed, traitors to their own people and to God. They even told Nehemiah that Tobiah was a good man!!!

Note that Meshullam, one of the family, worked in two places on the repairs of the wall while his family were being traitors, Nehemiah 3:4,30.

consider the message to Jeremiah from God " [Jeremiah 5:29-31](#)

"Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the Lord. "Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?"

"An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land:

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so."
But what will you do in the end?

Yet with all this opposition the work of God to restore Jerusalem was completed.

New reforms in Jerusalem which affect the Religious laws and people.

Though the city of Jerusalem was now physically protected, the walls and gates having been repaired, Nehemiah has a more difficult task, to restore the hearts of the people back to enjoy the life that God had planned for them and the city of Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem was one day to be where God would reveal Himself in the flesh as Jesus His Son. then take the sins of the world with His death on the cross.

Nehemiah knew that though there were not many people living in Jerusalem, the houses were still in need of repair so he would need some assistance. His first act following completion of the repairs was to appoint two assistants, his brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the palace. The citadel or palace was a fortress built in the temple area, [Nehemiah 2:8](#). This was used to guard the Northern side of the city which was the most open to attack.

Nehemiah had chosen these men because "they were faithful and feared God more than many."

Nehemiah issued instruction to Hanani and Hananiah concerning the guarding of the city, the gates always had a guard on duty and the time of open was restricted to prevent unauthorized entry to the city by the enemy. Two kinds of guard, "watches" were appointed, one was responsible to patrol the walls and the other was to keep watch near their own home. The city should now be safe from attack from the outside.

Today the Church needs guards on the "walls and doors" of any work for Christ, note a parable by Jesus, [Matt 13:24-30](#) and Paul's comments in [2 Cor 11:13-15](#). Test all against the Word of God.

The Jews who returned with Zerubbabel.

[Nehemiah 7:5-73](#).

This passage is very similar to Ezra 2:1-64 recorded nearly 100 years before, there are some small differences, name spelling, numbers, nothing which can cause a problem. Ezra 2 lists those who set out from Babylon with Ezra, it is possible others joined during the journey.

These people were those chosen by God to restore His city ready for the coming Messiah.

Genealogies were very important to the Jew, to prove their ancestry and that they were part of the chosen people of God. Nehemiah wanted to have Jerusalem the Holy City for Jews and they were proud of this fact. Today, through the Blood of Christ, all are one in Christ, Jew and non Jew.

Note the people listed were those who came with Ezra 100 years earlier, the Nehemiah mentioned is not the writer of this book. The list is by "village," the people still kept a record of their original roots.

Next is listed those associated with the temple work, one group, which included priests, could not prove their family connection, this would mean isolation from any temple duties.

Finally, in v67 we find a large number of servants, they must have had a good relationship with their Jewish masters to make the journey.

It is obvious that many of the Jews left Babylon as wealthy men, as their donations to the worship showed, but this did not last. The people had, in faith, left the comfort of Babylon to return to the Holy City of God, but it was not an easy life. Nehemiah knew that the people must put their faith back with God and turn away from any sin that was causing a problem with God. Though Nehemiah was the official representative of the Babylonian king, who did not believe in the True God, Nehemiah did everything to glorify God.

The family of God today are not just Jews, *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."* [John 1:11-13](#). God is still calling His people to commit their lives in faith to Him.

Note that the group of priests who could not demonstrate their family connections would never be able to enter the temple and assist in the worship, God does not care about our first birth, only the one through His Son, the second birth, which proves what family we belong to.

This chapter also reminds us that God has a record of His family, not written of parchment but written in heaven, [Rom 14:7-12](#)

Consecration. The Law is read and obeyed.

[Nehemiah 8:1-18](#).

The physical needs of Jerusalem, the city, had now been finished, the walls and gates were repaired.

Nehemiah now turns to the spiritual needs of the people.

Nehemiah chapters 8 to 13 record the following spiritual actions:-

Chapter 8, the Word of God is read and the people receive instruction.

Chapter 9, the people confess their sin.

Chapter 10-12, the city walls are dedicated.

Chapter 13, Fellowship and worship.

Nehemiah calls all the people to an open area near the water Gate, there Ezra the priest reads the "Book of

the Law of Moses," to the people gathered. This was probably the Torah, the five books of Moses, where is found the foundation of the Jewish faith.

The important point in reading the Word of God is that we must understand before it can be applied to our life, the word "understand" is used in verses, 2,3,7,8,12 and 13 to show that the people were able to receive the Word of God, once the Word is planted then it can grow and produce results, compare [Matt 13:1-9, 18-23](#), [Mark 4:1-20](#), [Luke 8:4-13](#), the story of the Sower, this story marks a new beginning in the sowers life, a period of labour followed by the reward.

Ezra was the perfect priest to take the teaching of the people, he "*had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*" [Ezra 7:10](#), it appears that he had come to Jerusalem some years before Nehemiah and had been trying to bring the people back to God, [Ezra chapter 7-10](#).

On the first day of the seventh month,(the Jewish New Year's Day) Ezra reads the Law out to the people, probably not all the books in the time mentioned, however, the words touch the hearts of the people and they bow in worship, weeping because of their failures to obey the Word of God, conscious of their sins.

Ezra started the reading and teaching in the square, he spoke for a number of hours, until midday. When he opened the book the people stood up in honour for the Word of God, and remained standing throughout.

This daily reading from the Word of God continued for a week,v18. The people were willing to devote half a day of their time for a week to listening to the Word's of God.

We have a much larger Bible text today, the Word of God. How do you reverence it? Is it just a book to you, to be used like any other book? Perhaps to even hold the door open!!!! Or does it mean something special, a book to treat with care and reverence?

The seventh month had a number of religious days, The feast of Trumpets on day 1, the Day of Atonement on day ten, and the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth to the twenty-first [Leviticus 23:23-44](#)

The Levites assisted Ezra in teaching, probably they were in the crowd and answered questions during pauses in the reading.

v17, The people had both joy and gladness on hearing the Word of God, they were glad to obey His Word.

v13-18. The following day the leaders found the reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, which all Jews should celebrate, they realized that they only had a few days to organize, they had read the Word of God, now they were obeying.

During the seven days of the festival the Jews were expected to live in small temporary buildings made from branches, often built on the roof of their houses. It was designed to make the people look back to the tribes forty years in the wilderness, when the people lived in tents and temporary buildings, but in addition it encouraged the people to look at what God had provided now, consider the words and commandments of [Deuteronomy 8:1ff](#). The feast was to remind the Jew of the blessings of God and their obedience to Him. A week of joy, praise and thanks to God for His blessings and goodness.

This feast was also a time of the giving of gifts to others, especially those who were poor.

[Nehemiah 8:17](#) seems to suggest that this feast had not been celebrated since the times of Joshua, this however was not true as [2 Chronicles 8:13](#) and [Ezra 3:1-4](#) indicates that it had still been celebrated but with a very different attitude, the people only had a token agreement to the feast, unlike this time.

Read and consider the thoughts of [2 Chronicles 7:14](#) "*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*"

The people confess.

[Nehemiah 9:1 to 10:39](#).

The feast of Tabernacles has now ended, yet the people were still seeking to hear the Word of God, "*the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.*" The hearing of the Word of God was convicting the people of their sin. The people were standing in reverence, listening to the Word of God for a quarter of the day followed by a further quarter of the day in confession of their sins, then worship and praise of God.

The people felt that they must separate themselves from the world around them as they draw nearer to the God of Love and grace, look at [2 Cor 6:14-18](#), God had chosen the Jew to be His special people, they cannot be part of the world around them. Think about your life as a True Believer, [1 Peter 1:15](#); [1 Peter 2:9-10](#).

V6 The True God is God alone, the world will 'worship' anything that suits them, 'idolatry' come in many

forms. The Jewish nation were the witnesses for the True God, to God idolatry was the same as adultery, so when the Jews turned to idolatry He had to punish them.

The universe is created by God, all the evidence of His attributes are there for us to see and examine, [Rom 1:18-21](#), but Mankind prefers his own way, [Rom 1:22-31](#). To know that our God is creator and controls all things is a source of great peace and power, but idolatry is worshipping the creation, the creature rather than the true Creator. The wonderful fact is that the Creator is still caring for His creation, He even knows how many hairs are on your head, [Luke 12:7](#). V6. Finally "*The host of heaven worships You.*" The angels worship, but because of what He has done for us we should have even greater praise than angels as He has offered eternal salvation through His grace, so that one day we are to be like His Son Jesus, children of God, [1 John 3:1-3](#).

God and mankind: [Nehemiah 9:7-35](#).

The verses look back at all the events associated with the Jewish nation, from His choice of Abram, [Genesis 12:1ff](#), it shows the many gifts He has provided over the time, the word "give" appears many times in the verses in various forms. We read that God gave:-

The land, [Nehemiah 9:8,15,35](#).

[Genesis 12:1ff](#)

The law, [Nehemiah 9:13](#).

[Exodus 20:1ff](#)

The presence of the Spirit, [Nehemiah 9:20](#).

Food and water, [Nehemiah 9:15](#).

Punishment when they failed and a way back, [Nehemiah 9:27](#).

Victorious in battle, [Nehemiah 9:22,24](#).

The Jewish people delighted themselves in the gifts and goodness of God, but had no concern or desire to worship and honour God. Even so God was faithful to bless when they obeyed, and punished but faithfully restored when they disobeyed Him.

This unfortunately can happen in a church or ministry, look at [Rev 3:14-22](#), the Laodiceans church had become rich with the goodness of God but now, "*I will vomit you out of My mouth.*" said the Lord.

[Nehemiah 9:31-38](#): "For You are God, gracious and merciful."

These verses show the goodness of God, He sent many prophets to warn and teach. The people ignored the warnings and rebelled against Him, God could have destroyed the nation, see [Exodus 32:10](#), but His love and grace spared them, "*For You have dealt faithfully,*" v33.

The sad fact was that after 70 years in Babylon as punishment they were now back in their land but still lived a life against the Lord, so God had left them still under control of the Persian king, still slaves.

In this prayer offered by the Levites they were acknowledging God, His grace, goodness and mercy, and were asking for a new start for the nation, they had no control of their situation but by giving themselves to God for help, He could control all things.

They not only asked for mercy but made a covenant to obey His law and seek His will.

Having looked at the prayer of confession of these people have you any thing to say to God?

[Nehemiah 10:1-39](#): We find a list of people who agreed and signed the covenant, headed by Nehemiah it includes priests, Levites, the leaders of the people. Many did not sign but were prepared to agree to the covenant. This included wives and children who were not legally allowed to sign. Read [Numbers 30:1ff](#) to see the commitment of this covenant with God, Jesus pointed out the dangers of an oath in [Matt 5:33-37](#); [Matt 23:16-22](#). Since the death of the Son of God on the cross a true Believers relationship to God is as "Father to child" so oaths should not be needed.

A promise to separation: [Nehemiah 10:30-31](#).

The Jewish people now living back in their land were surrounded by many Gentile nations who had no care for the things of the True God. These Gentiles were doing their best to convert the Jew to their idolatry, to be part of their religious, business and social society, but under the Law they were prohibited from living like the Gentiles. They were still allowed to be good customers and neighbour's. It was the duty of the priests to "*teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*" [Ezekiel 44:23](#). The act of separation by the Jew, or a True Believer is a total proof of devotion and love for God, the complete commitment to His Word and Will, in faith we give ourselves to God.

There are two main areas of concern, intermarriage and behaviour on the Sabbath. God had forbidden intermarrying with non-Jews because it would encourage the people to turn to the Gentile attitude to God, how could a Jew who was married to a non-Jew follow the dietary laws or the special festivals of remembrance implemented by God. According to the law the person would be ceremonially unclean, therefore be unable to be involved in any Jewish ceremony and would eventually turn away from the Law and things of God. Consider the effect for a Believer, [2 Cor 6:14 to 7:1](#).

The observance of the Sabbath was a practice only associated with the Jew, [Exodus 20:8-11](#). This would cause a serious problem for the Jewish business men as the Gentile nations worked seven days while the Jew would each seventh day take a day of rest and spiritual thoughts, a reminder that they were the chosen nation of God.

The original instruction for the Sabbath, as given through Moses, were not specific except the avoidance of unnecessary work like the lighting of a fire, [Exodus 35:1-3](#); [Exodus 31:12-17](#); [Exodus 35:1-3](#); [Leviticus 19:30](#); [Leviticus 23:3](#); [Numbers 15:32-36](#). The prophet reprimanded the Jews many times over their failure to keep the Sabbath as it showed the nations rejection of the Law.

Unfortunately the Sabbath was to become a day of misery and restriction by the times of Jesus, [Mark 2:23-27](#); [Luke 6:1-11](#); [Luke 13:10-17](#).

This Sabbath covenant also included the seven years Sabbatical for the land, [Leviticus 25:1ff](#)

Financial support for the Temple: [Nehemiah 10:32-39](#):

The people were prepared to promise the financial needs of the repaired temple. This is a sign of their respect for their place of worship. The method of support was in four ways:

A Temple Tax for those over twenty years of age, v32,33.

[Exodus 30:11-16](#).

An offering of wood for the altars, v34. Any one can make this offering to the temple.

[Leviticus 6:12-13](#).

The first fruits, v35-37

Because God saved the first born Jew from death in Egypt, the firstborn male and beast belongs to God, [Exodus 13:1-16](#); [Luke 2:22-24](#).

The Tithes, v37-39

The word "*tithe*" means "a tenth", The Jew had to bring a tithe of their produce each year to the temple for the support of the Levites. [Leviticus 27:30-34](#). The levites then gave a "tithe" to the priests, [Numbers 18:25-32](#).

There is no direct command for the New Testament Believer, only [1 Cor 16:1-3](#) is commended reference to giving. Also consider [2 Cor 8:1 to 9:15](#).

List of people living in Jerusalem.

[Nehemiah 11:1 to 12:26](#).

What to do with Jerusalem?

The repair work on the city of Jerusalem was now complete, a city will be no use unless people live and use it.

As a large protected city it did offer a possible threat to the enemy, but it also need people to carry out any defence needed.

The city was the center of the Jewish worship, the temple and the people were there to be a witness of God to the Gentile nations. If the people wanted to honour and love God then they would want to live as near to the temple as possible.

The Holy City was all part of the plans of God, it was essential that Jerusalem became used, with the people serving God and preparing the city for the future tasks.

It appears that many of the people were living in small villages around the city because of the previous state of repair of the city and the houses had not encouraged them to live there, [Nehemiah 7:4](#)

Nehemiah had to find some way of encouraging the people to move into the city. Some volunteered willingly, others had to be chosen by the use of casting lots, "drafted" in by their name being "pulled out of an hat."

I'm sure many were reluctant to move into the city, but God knew and was fully in control of those selected. Has God ever asked you to move for His ministry?

The people of Judah and Benjamin are listed first because these two tribes were the "kingdom of Judah"

after the nation divided, [1 Kings 11-12](#).

Next comes the priests, Levites and temple workers. In the beginning God had nominated special cities for this group to live in, [Joshua 21:1-45](#), so they could have demanded that they live outside the city, but they chose to live with the people and serve God in the city. The priests and Levites each had their specific jobs, prayer and praise, singers, maintenance, guards and so on, many people were required to complete the function of the temple.

v23, Nehemiah records that the king of Persia had provided financial support for the temple ministry. The king wanted the priests to pray for him and his family, [Ezra 6:8-10](#). Consider the thoughts of [1 Timothy 2:1-8](#).

v24, Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, was the agent of the king, he would act as representative for the Jews before the king.

Nehemiah lists the names of the villages where the Jews were living in verses 25-36, some were a long way from Jerusalem. The people had returned to their families place of birth when they had returned from Babylon.

Dedication of the walls and Temple services.

[Nehemiah 12:27-47](#).

The people had dedicated themselves to God earlier, now it was the time to dedicate the work and city to God. Singing is mentioned a number of times, it was planned to be a time of joyful praise. The dedication was aimed at the walls and Gates so they had to be involved.

To achieve this, the priests, Levites and people involved in the service were split into two groups, Ezra the priest leading one group and Nehemiah following the second group. Starting at the Water Gate the two groups marched round the walls in the opposite directions, Ezra going south towards the Dung gate, Fountain Gate and the Water Gate (v31-37). The group with Nehemiah headed North, v38,39, passing the Old Gate, the Ephraim Gate, the Fish Gate, the Sheep Gate and so on until the two groups met in the temple area. There the people worshipped and offered sacrifices to the Lord.

This act by the people showed that they were loudly giving thanks, joyfully and with praise for what God had done for them, together, with His help, they had repaired the walls, now built strong enough for the people to march on them, (see [Nehemiah 4:3](#);) and together the gates had been restored, [Nehemiah 6:16](#). Note that the praise also came from the women and children who were normally not involved, [Nehemiah 12:43](#).

Gifts to God. [Nehemiah 12:44-47](#). The covenant with the Lord that the people had made involved tithes and offerings for the work of the temple, the people were pleased with the work of the priests etc., and brought their offerings, some of the Levites were appointed to collect and store these offerings.

This was a glorious day but unfortunately it was not to last!

Nehemiah final acts.

[Nehemiah 13:1-30](#).

Nehemiah was away back in Babylon for a period at the command of the king, while there things turned for the worse.

The people had willingly consecrated and separated themselves from the non Jew in the area, to walk according to the Law, but it appears that this had not been a complete separation, there were still Ammonites and Moabites in the assembly, this was contrary to the instructions given by God to Moses, [Deuteronomy 23:3,4](#). The tribes of Ammonites and Moabites were created by the incestuous sexual relationship of Lot and two of his daughters, [Genesis 19:30-38](#). By living with the Jews the Ammonites and Moabites were getting the blessings with their Jewish neighbour's, but were not accepting the rules, obligations and behaviour required of the Jews.

Read the story of the how the Ammonites and Moabites reacted to the Jews in [Numbers 22 and 23](#). Today the Church must watch out for those who try to get the blessings but keep the Church seeking to please the world desires.

v4-9, Not only were Jews married and associating with the Ammonites and Moabites but one, Tobiah the Ammonite was using a room in the temple, this had been supplied by Eliashib the high priest, v28. Eliashib had a position of great responsibility and power but was disobeying the law because one of his relatives was

married to Sanballat's daughter, he was a traitor to his own people, see [Nehemiah 6:17-19](#).

Not only was Tobiah the Ammonite living in the temple, with permission of the high priest, but he was using a room set aside for the offerings dedicated to God for use by the Levites, he was defiling (treating something holy with disrespect) the temple but stealing the facility for the servants of God.

On the return of Nehemiah he lost no time in removing the Ammonite and rededicating the room to God. He also found that the people had turned away from their promise, offerings were not being given for the Levites to work in the temple and so had to return to their farms.

Nehemiah soon found other problems, the people had returned back to working on the Sabbath, were allowing people from Tyre to live in Jerusalem and trade on the Sabbath. Nehemiah stopped this by closing the city gates throughout the Sabbath day. The merchants and sellers at first tried to carry on selling outside the wall, but Nehemiah made threats to arrest them if they tried to sell on the Sabbath and this stopped the trade.

The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is not the equivalent to a Christian Sabbath, the rules of the Sabbath apply to the Jews, but Sunday is a special day for the people of God who remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Nehemiah now surveys the city and soon finds how much they had failed to fulfill their promise to God, the Jewish men had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, even their children spoke the mothers language.

Nehemiah is very angry with the failure of the people, the law of Moses was clear, but it had been deliberately broken, not only the people but also by the priests.

Nehemiah purified the priests, ensure only those who were legally qualified were appointed as priest. Unfortunately the problem soon reappears.

Nehemiah depended upon a prayer time with God for help as he needed, he regularly has short prayers throughout the book, the book finishes with two prayers, the last being "*Remember me, O my God, for good!*" He knew that God would reward one day.