

NEHEMIAH

page 2.

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

Though the city of Jerusalem was now physically protected, the walls and the 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 to have 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, "or 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,

[Matthew 13:24-30](#)

Followed by Paul's comments in [2 Corinthians 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 now 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," because 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 verse 67 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 action 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.

[John 1:11-13.](#)

"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."

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.

These words also reminds us that God has a record of His family, not written on parchment but written in heaven,

[Romans 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 sins.

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 [Matthew 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 a 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 chapters 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, very 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, verse 18. 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.

Verse 17: The people had both joy and gladness on hearing the Word of God, they were glad to obey His Word.

Verses 13-18: The following day the leaders found the reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, which all Jews should be celebrating, 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 sins. 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 Corinthians 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](#).

Verse 6 The True God is God alone, only the world will 'worship' anything that suits them, 'idolatry' can 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,

[Romans 1:18-21](#),

But Mankind prefers his own way, [Romans 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](#).

Verse 6: 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 they 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 them when they obeyed Him.

This unfortunately can happen in a church or ministry,

Look at [Revelations 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. But, 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,"* verse 33.

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, therefore, God had left them still under control of the Persian king, still his slaves.

In [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 [Matthew 5:33-37](#);

[Matthew 23:16-22](#).

Since the death of the Son of God on the cross the 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 become 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 area's of concern, intermarriage and behaviour on the Sabbath. God had forbidden intermarrying with non-Jew 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, verses 32,33.

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

An offering of wood for the altars, verse 34. Any one can make this offering to the temple.

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

The first fruits, verses 35-37.

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, verses 37-39

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 by God for the New Testament Believer to Tithe, only [1 Corinthians 16:1-3](#) is commended reference to giving. Also consider [2 Corinthians 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 needs 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. The houses had not encouraged them to live there,

[Nehemiah 7:4](#)

Nehemiah had to find some way of encouraging the people to move back into the city. Some volunteered willingly, others had to be chosen by the use of casting lots, or "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, there are many people who were required to complete the function of the temple.

Verse 23: 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.](#)

Verse 24: Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, was the agent of the king, he would act as representative for the Jews before the king.

Nehemiah now 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" (verses 31-37). The group with Nehemiah headed North, verses 38,39, 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.

The actions 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 be the 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, the obligations and the 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.

Verses 4-9: 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, verse 28.

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 the 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 of 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 returned 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 mother 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 found each problem, he regularly had 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.