

Bible Book of Whenever (B-BOW)

Nehemiah

Hello, Friends, and Welcome!

Here's the reading plan for Nehemiah:

13 Chapters: You can easily read Nehemiah through twice in a month by reading one chapter a day. If you want to get a sense of the whole story of the Jews near the end of their exile, it is good to read Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. Ezra and Nehemiah tell us about what is happening in the homeland, while Esther is concerned with Jews who remained in Persia. You could read all three books in a month—easily!

Here's the Swedish Marking System:

- ? Something I don't understand, or would like to know more about, etc.
- ★ Something I think is really good, helpful, inspiring, etc.
- Something I need to think about, work on, etc.

Title

Nehemiah means “Comforted of Yahweh.” He was a cupbearer (**1:12**) under the Persian king Artaxerxes I, which meant he not only selected the wine and tasted it to make sure that there was no poison in it, but he was also a personal advisor to the king. Nehemiah was also a great leader, builder, and governor of Jerusalem. Nehemiah never appears in scripture outside of this book. He is never quoted by any other Biblical writers.

Significance

Nehemiah and Ezra provide us with the only Hebrew account of Jewish history after the Babylonian exile and return to Judah. At one time, it is thought that both of these books were put together as one book. When you read them both, you can see how this would happen, as their stories are somewhat interconnected. Nehemiah's book takes us to the end of the record of Old Testament history. From the end of Nehemiah until the birth of Jesus there are about 400 years. During that time no Scripture was written, no prophet spoke that we know of. Often this period is referred to as “400 Years of Silence.”

Outline

The book can be divided into major sections dealing with the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (**chs. 1-7**) and the revival of the people (**chs. 8-13**). There are many details, but a simple outline of Nehemiah could be:

I. Rebuilding the Walls (**1-7**)

II. Reviving the People (**8-13**)

Note as you read that there is a gap of around 20 years between **chapters 12 and 13**. Actually, the events in **1-12** cover about one year...So, reviving the people actually took more time than rebuilding the walls!

Some Things to Note as you read:

1. Concern for God's word:

A revival came in response to Ezra's reading of "the Book of the Law of Moses" (**8:1**). After the reading, Ezra and some of the priests carefully explained its meaning to the people in attendance (**8:8**). The next day, Ezra met with some of the fathers of the households, the priests, and Levites, "in order to understand the words of the Law" (**8:13**). The sacrificial system was carried on with careful attention to perform it "as it is written in the Law" (**10:34, 36**). So deep was their concern to abide by God's revealed will that they took "a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law ... " (**10:29**). When marriage reforms were carried out, they acted in accordance with that which "they read from the Book of Moses" (**13:1**).

2. The different types of People God uses: God places His people in strategic places (Nehemiah reminds us of Joseph in Egypt, or Daniel in Babylon—individuals placed in the courts of Kings). God puts things into Nehemiah's heart (**7:5**). He also works through the favor of the Persian Kings to send people back, fund their projects, and even give protection for the project.

3. Dealing with opposition: (you also see this in Ezra). The enemies of God's people don't like it when they get busy...They start rumors, try to intimidate..and yet the whole project of completing the walls only took 52 days (**6:15**). At times Nehemiah had some working and others guarding, and his workers kept a sword in one hand (**4:16-18**). You will notice that even some of Nehemiah's opposition came from his own people...dragging their feet, treating their own people badly. A powerful resource is to have the "good hand of God" (**1:10; 2:8, 18**) on your life.

4. **The importance of prayer:** Nehemiah was certainly a praying man. He prays for God to bless his work, and to curse his enemies. He has a practicality about his prayers, combining prayer with watching and readiness to engage the enemy if needed (remember the old phrase, “Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition?” see **4:9**). He also records prayers of others on behalf of the nation.

Here are some references for prayer in Nehemiah:

1:1-4; 2:4; 4:4-5; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31

In **9:5-38** you will find a “National Prayer”

Memory Verses

Two good verses are:

Nehemiah 4:6—We built the wall, because the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 8:10—the Joy of the Lord is your strength.

Research

Look for a **map of Jerusalem** in Nehemiah's day. Some commentators have made much of the reconstruction of the wall following the **ten gates of the city**. There could be some symbolism in the names of the gates:

The Sheep Gate (**3:1**); Fish Gate (**3:3**); Old Gate (**3:6**); Valley Gate (**3:13**); Dung Gate (**3:14**); Fountain Gate (**3:15**); Water Gate (**3:25,26**); East Gate (**3:29**); Horse Gate (**3:28**); and Muster Gate (**3:31**). Consult a good commentary or Bible Dictionary for information about these gates.

During the Babylonian exile several important **institutions of the Jews** emerged. Each one is worth studying in a Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia:

- The Synagogue
- The Scribes
- The Sanhedrin

For Students of Bible Prophecy, there is a significant reference in Nehemiah in relation to some of Daniel's prophecy. In **Daniel 9:25-27**, there is a section called his prophecy of the Seventy Weeks: These "weeks" or "sevens" are dated from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (See **Daniel 9:25**). **Nehemiah 2: 1** gives us the time of this decree. In Daniel's prophecy, we are told the Messiah would come after 69 weeks, and this is fulfilled in 33 A.D. (you can look this up online or in a good commentary on Daniel's prophecy).

The prophet Malachi lived and ministered during Nehemiah's time. When you read Malachi, you can get a glimpse of the spiritual state of the people in and around Jerusalem at that time.

Three Old Testament prophets ministered after the exile: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Haggai and Zechariah ministered in the days of Zerubbabel (recorded in Ezra), when the first wave of people returned to their homeland.

The 400 Years of Silence: the time period from the end of Nehemiah until the coming of Christ. This time period is also referred to as the "Intertestamental" (meaning "between the testaments") Period. Look the term up in your computer. One good resource is Bruce Metzger's *The New Testament, It's Background Growth and Content*.