

Bible Study Notes and Questions on the Book of Nehemiah

Overview of the Book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah had been born as a Jew in exile. His name means “the Lord comforts” or “the comfort of God”. He proved to be a faithful servant of God and had an honourable and influential appointment in the Persian court being the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. This Persian king had been supportive of the Jews probably helped by his stepmother being Queen Esther who was Jewish.

It was evident that Nehemiah took an interest in the Jewish people in Jerusalem. When news (**1:1-3**) came of the sad state of Jerusalem in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes (**445 BC**), Nehemiah was moved to much prayer and fasting (**1:4-11**). After a period of about four months he made known his distress to King Artaxerxes, who was very willing to send him on leave with letters to Jerusalem to be governor there for twelve years (**2:1-9**).

On his arrival at Jerusalem (**444BC**), Nehemiah took time to view the state of the city (**2:11-16**) before reasoning with the rulers, nobles and priests to rebuild the walls and gates (**2:17-18**). The work began in earnest (**3:1-32; 4:6**) but not without opposition (**2:10, 19-20**). The hostility to this work, namely from Sanballet, the Horonite, Tobiah, the Ammonite and Geshem, the Arabian came about in a number of ways (**4:1-5, 7-8, 11-12**), but Nehemiah ensured there was adequate defence to deal with any attacks from the enemy (**4:9, 13-23**). In the midst of this work Nehemiah had to deal with the internal problems of the oppression of the nobles and rulers upon their Jewish brethren (**5:1-13**). Nehemiah had shown his generosity with much hospitality probably throughout his time as governor of Jerusalem (**5:14-19**). He continued to stand firm against the opposition attempting to divert him from the work (**6:1-14**) and as a result the walls were completed in **52** days (**6:15**). Even the enemies of Nehemiah had to acknowledge the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem as being of God (**6:16**).

The remaining part of the overview has been summarised as follows:

6:17-19: Many nobles amongst the Jews were associated with the Tobiah, the Ammonite.

7:1-3: Hanani and Hananiah were given responsibility as rulers over Jerusalem.

7:4-73: Nehemiah found a register of the Jewish captives when they had returned to Jerusalem cf. **Ezra 2:1-70**.

8:1-12: At the request of the people the law was read to them by Ezra, the scribe.

8:13-18: The leaders, priests and Levites came together with Ezra, the scribe for a bible study. They discovered that God’s word commanded them to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. The people celebrate this feast in obedience to the law of God.

9:1-38: The Jews set themselves apart to worship the Lord, confessing their sins and acknowledging the Lord in prayer especially of his mercy to them.

10:1-39: A covenant was signed publicly by Nehemiah, the priests, Levites and leaders of the people. The rest of the people made a declaration to serve the Lord and to obey his commandments.

11:1-24: There is a record of the children of Israel who willingly came to live in Jerusalem.

11:25-36: There are villages outside Jerusalem where the children of Israel lived.

12:1-26: There is a record of the priests and Levites.

12:27-43: The wall of Jerusalem dedicated by two choirs.

12:44-47: The daily portion was given to the Levites and priests so that they can maintain service in the temple.

13:1-3: Separation was made of the mixed multitude according to the law of God.

13:4-31: Nehemiah had to make further reforms after his return to Jerusalem for the second time in about **425BC**. Within a very short time the children of Israel had backslidden in their disobedience to the word of God.

There is much evidence that Nehemiah was the author of much of this book as shown by writing in the first person (“I”). Some parts could have been written by Ezra particularly in **Chapters 8,9,10**.

Time chart for the Book of Nehemiah

The chart shows the relationship to the books of Ezra and Esther and the Persian kings

- 586BC** Babylonian Captivity when Jerusalem fell being totally destroyed.
(First Jewish exile: 606BC; Second Jewish exile 597BC)
- 559-530BC:** CYRUS, king of Persia.
- 538BC** First return of 50000 Jewish exiles led by Zerubbabel to Jerusalem.
- 536BC** Work begins on the temple but temporarily ceased because of opposition.
- 530-522BC:** CAMBYSES
- 522-486BC:** DARIUS I
- 520BC** Work resumed on the temple under Darius.
- 516BC** The work on the temple completed.
- 486-465BC:** XERXES I (Ahasuerus)
- 479BC** Esther became queen (Esther 2:15-17).
- 465-424BC:** ARTAXERXES I
- 458BC** Second return of about 1800 Jewish exiles to Jerusalem led by Ezra, the scribe.
- 444-432BC:** Nehemiah, cupbearer to Artaxerxes I, came to Jerusalem for 12 years as governor.
- 425BC?** Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to bring reforms to the city.
- The events of the book of Ezra: **538-458BC**
The events of the book of Esther: **483-471BC**
The events of the book of Nehemiah: **445-425BC**

Questions on the Book of Nehemiah

Section One: Chapters 1&2

- Q.1)** Look carefully at **1:1-3**. What three things tell us the situation in Judah was not good? Can you see the spiritual lessons for the Church when in a poor state spiritually?
- Q.2)** Read the prayer of Nehemiah in **1:4-11**. What lessons do we learn from this prayer of intercession?
- Q.3)** Why did Nehemiah have access to the presence of the king of Persia? Read **1:11**. Can you suggest how he was appointed to such a position?
- Q.4)** How was God at work in sending Nehemiah to Jerusalem? See **2:1-10**.
- Q.5)** Is there evidence that Artaxerxes, king of Persia, was very supportive of the Jews? See **2:1-9** and **Ezra 7:11-28**.
- Q.6)** Do you think that Nehemiah was wise in delaying telling people his intention of seeing the walls rebuilt? See **2:11-18**.
- Q.7)** How did the opposition react to Nehemiah's intention to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and what was Nehemiah's response to the opposition? Read **2:11-18**.

Section Two: Chapters 3&4

- Q.1)** Read **3:1-32**. **A)** What is the key word in **3:1-32**?
B) Name the gates and what spiritual significance do they have?
See **3:1, 3, 6, 13, 15, 28-29, 31**.
- C)** Can we learn from this chapter the attitude towards God's work in rebuilding the walls?
See **3:5, 9, 12, 20**.
- Q.2)** What can we learn of the tactics of the enemy in opposing the walls being rebuilt?
See **4:1-3, 7, 8, 10-13**.
- Q.3)** Look carefully at Nehemiah's prayer in **4:4-5**. In view of what is written in **Matthew 5:44** and **Romans 12:19-21** should we be praying today like Nehemiah had done in his time?
- Q.4)** How did Nehemiah respond to such opposition and what lessons do we understand of spiritual warfare in **chapter 4**?
- Q.5)** Read carefully **4:19-23**. What part in the work did Nehemiah take up whilst the walls were being rebuilt?

Section Three: Chapters 5&6

- Q.1)** What internal problems did Nehemiah have to address in **5:1-13**?
- Q.2)** Read carefully **5:14-16**. How did Nehemiah stand out as an excellent governor compared to his predecessors?
- Q.3)** How did Nehemiah show generosity in hospitality? See **5:16-19**.
- Q.4)** What further tactics of the enemy do we see in the conspiracy against Nehemiah in **6:1-14**?
- Q.5)** How did Nehemiah deal with the opposition? See **6:3, 8-9, 10-14**.
- Q.6)** Read again carefully **6:10-13**. Why did Nehemiah refuse to go to the temple? See also **Numbers 18:7** and **2Chronicles 26:16-21**.
- Q.7)** How did the enemy respond when the walls and gates were completed? See **6:15-16**.
- Q.8)** Read **6:17-19**. Can you see two further ways being used by the enemies of the Jews against Nehemiah?

Section Four: Chapters 7&8

- Q.1)** In what way had Nehemiah shown wisdom regarding who should take charge of Jerusalem? Why did Nehemiah choose two men? See **7:1-3** and also **3:9, 12**.
- Q.2)** How did Nehemiah ensure security in Jerusalem? See **7:3-4**; **Psalms 127:1**; **Isaiah 62:6-7**.
- Q.3)** What is the significant about the register in **7:4-73**? Can you show why the names are important? Look carefully at **7:61-65** and see also **Luke 10:20**; **Revelation 20:15**; **21:27**.
- Q.4)** Read carefully **8:1-12**. What was the response of the people to the word of God?
- Q.5)** What was significant about where the law was read and the day it was read on? Read again **8:1-3**. See also **Leviticus 23:23-25** and **Numbers 29:1-6**.
- Q.6)** What did the leaders, priests and Levites discover after studying the word of God on the second day? See **8:13-15**.
- Q.7)** What do you think happens when there is obedience to God's word? Read **8:16-18**.

Section Five Chapters 9&10

- Q.1)** Read carefully the prayer in **9:1-38**.
- A)** What was shown of who God is? Read particularly **9:5-11, 15, 17, 19, 28, 31-33**.
- B)** What sins were confessed? Read **9:16-18, 26-30, 33-35, 37**.
- C)** What judgments were shown? Read **9:11, 27-28, 30, 37**.
- D)** What does this prayer teach regarding repentance? See **9:1-3, 32-37**.
- E)** What does this chapter reveal of what God has done for his people?
- Q.2)** How did the Jews respond to this prayer? See **9:38-10:39** especially **10:28-39**. Show how they intended to obey God's laws.
- Q.3)** What does it mean in **10:29** to "enter into a curse and into an oath"?
- Q.4)** Read again carefully **10:28-39**. What does the text teach us about the meaning of whole-hearted consecration? See also **Proverbs 3:5-10**; **Malachi 3:8-11**; **1Corinthians 16:1-2**; **2Corinthians 6:14-18**; **7:1**.

Section Six Chapters 11, 12&13

- Q.1)** Who lived in Jerusalem? Read **11:1-19**.
- Q.2)** What was known of the people who lived outside Jerusalem? See **11:20-32**.
- Q.3)** What do we know about the priests and the Levites in **12:1-26**?
- Q.4)** What can we learn about the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem? Read **12:27-43** especially verses **27, 30** and **33**.
- Q.5)** Show from **12:43-47** the evidence that the people were supporting the singers, gatekeepers, Levites and priests.
- Q.6)** What did the people do in obedience to the law? See **13:1-3**.
- Q.7)** What lessons can we learn from Nehemiah cleansing the temple in **13:7-14**? See also **Matthew 21:12-16**; **Mark 1:15-19**; **Luke 19:45-48**; **John 2:13-17**.
- Q.8)** Show how the children of Israel had backslidden during the time Nehemiah had returned to King Artaxerxes of Persia. Read **13:4, 7, 10, 15-16, 23, 24**.
- Q.9)** How did Nehemiah deal with the sin of his people Israel? Read **13:8-9, 11-13, 17-22, 25-28, 30-31**.

Miscellaneous Questions

Q.1) Show the qualities Nehemiah had as a leader.

Read **1:11; 2:7-9,20; 4:13-23; 5:10-19; 6:11-13; 7:1-5; 8:9; 13:4-31.**

Q.2) What does this book teach about revival?

Read **2:17; 3:1-32; 4:6; 8:1-18; 9:1-4; 12:30,43; 13:1-3,23-31.**

Q.3) What lessons do we see from the Book of Nehemiah in how the Church of Jesus Christ can be built up? You will need to look again particularly at **chapters 3-6, 8-10** and **13.**

Q.4) What does this book teach us about prayer?

Read **1:4-11; 2:4; 4:4-5,9; 6:9,14; 9:1-38; 13:14,22,29,31.**

Q.5) What can we understand of the strategy of the devil in this book?

Read **2:10,19; 4:1-3, 7-9, 10-23; 6:1-4, 5-9, 10-12, 13, 17-19.**

Q.6) Show how Nehemiah was faithful on obeying God's laws.

See **8:1-18; 9:1-38; 10:28-39; 13:1-31.**

Q.7) Read carefully again the Book of Nehemiah. What was known about the city of Jerusalem and its significance spiritually?

Bibliography

The list of resources available will be helpful in finding out more about the Book of Nehemiah. The author does not necessarily agree with the views held by the writers of the following reading material.

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