

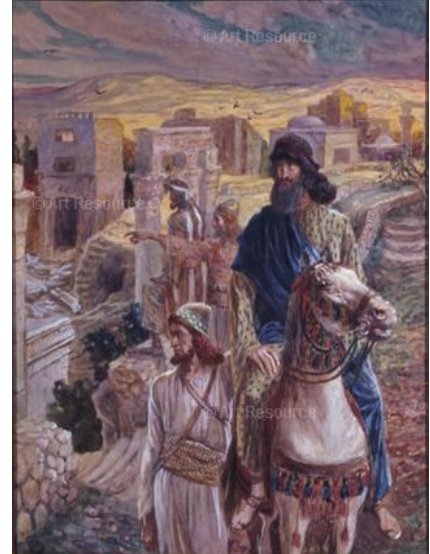
Nehemiah

Message

Nehemiah proves that seemingly impossible things are possible through prayer and hard work when God's people determine to trust and obey God, and put His interests first.¹

Theological Purpose

Nehemiah, like Ezra, wrote his book to record the historical events of the postexilic era in which he encouraged the returnees of the postexilic community to join with him in rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem and to return to their covenantal obligations by confessing their sins and committing themselves to follow the covenant stipulations *so they could experience Yahweh's blessings and restoration as His chosen people.*



Title

The Hebrew title of this book נְהִמְיָהוּ , *nehem-yah*, is the same as the English translation “Nehemiah,” and means “Yahweh comforts.” Nehemiah, was named after the principal character in the book. The Septuagint (Greek) translation also has the same title. As was mentioned in the notes on Ezra, ancient Jewish tradition regarded Ezra and Nehemiah as a single composition, and as a result, they kept the two volumes together for many years. The reason was the historical continuity that flows from Ezra through Nehemiah.²

Author

The Book of Nehemiah provides a vivid record of Nehemiah's personal memoirs: “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah” (1:1). The fact that the narrative is written in the first person singular identifies the author as Nehemiah (1:1–2:20; 13:4-31). Nehemiah was appointed the governor of the Persian province of Judah by King Artaxerxes (5:14).³ For additional connections between this book and Ezra, see the *Introduction* to Ezra.

The Man Nehemiah. Nothing is known of Nehemiah beyond that which is contained in his book. His father's name was Hacaliah (1:1) and he had a brother named Hanani (1:2). It is most likely that Nehemiah's family was taken into captivity when Jerusalem

¹This is the message statement suggest by Tom Constable, “Nehemiah,” unpublished class notes in course # 303 Old Testament History II, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1995.

²Ibid.

³John C. Whitcomb, Jr., “Nehemiah,” in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 435.

fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Nehemiah was likely born in Persian captivity sometime during or immediately after Zerubbabel's ministry in Jerusalem. While in Persia, Nehemiah, like Daniel before him, rose to a place of great prominence in the palace of the Gentile ruler of his day. In Nehemiah's case, that was Artaxerxes I (464–423 B.C.). Nehemiah became the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I (1:11; cf. 2:1). His was an influential position of prominence and one that provided him with the unique opportunity to petition the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem. His reliance on God resulted in his prayers to return to Jerusalem to participate in rebuilding the wall being answered by God (1:4-11; 2:4b). The Lord moved the king's heart (Prov 21:1) to not only allow him to return but also to provide all the materials needed for the building project from the king's royal treasuries.

Nehemiah, like Ezra, also stands out as a true spiritual man of God. An outstanding feature of his book are the numerous prayers that are recorded. His prayers provide his readers with a glimpse into the spiritual life of this man. He also shows the harmony that exists between spiritual principals (divine sovereignty) and secular/human principles of godly leadership used for the purpose of accomplishing the purposes of God.

Date of Composition and Place of Origin:

Since Nehemiah was a contemporary of Ezra, the Book of Nehemiah was probably written shortly after the completion of the events contained in the book. Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I of Persia who reigned from 464 to 423 B.C. The return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem is firmly fixed as having taken place in 444 B.C. "in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes I" (2:1). He served as governor of Judea for 12 years before returning to the Persian Court in 432 B.C. "in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes' reign" (5:14; 13:6). He returned to Judah a short time later and served a second term as governor of Judea until 426 B.C. Although the events recorded in Nehemiah span a period of approximately twenty years, from 445 to 426 B.C., the book seems to have been written in retrospect. Therefore, a date of composition, say between 430-425 B.C., after Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to initiate his final reforms, seems to best accommodate the facts in evidence.

Recipients

The book was most likely written in Jerusalem to the postexilic Jewish community living in that city some time between 430-425 B.C.

A Chronology of Nehemiah

The events recorded in the Book of Nehemiah occurred during the reign of Artaxerxes I King of Persia (465-423) and may be summarized according to the following charts:

Gentile Rulers of the Period

Cyrus 559-530	Cambyses 530-522	Snerdis 522	Darius I 522-486	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) 486-465	Artaxerxes I 464-423	Xerxes II 423	Darius 422-404
575	550	525	500	475	450	425	425

Chronology of Nehemiah

Reference	Incident	Date
Daniel & Ezekiel	Three deportations and final destruction of Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom of Judah as sovereign discipline by YHWH	605, 579, and 586 B.C.
1:1-3	Nehemiah receives a report about the walls of Jerusalem	Nov/Dec 445 B.C.
2:1	Nehemiah requests leave from Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem and is appointed Governor of Jerusalem (a province of Persia)	Mar/Apr 444 B.C.
2:17-18	Nehemiah leads the people to begin rebuilding the walls	Aug 2, 444 B.C.
6:15	The building of the walls was completed in 52 days	Sept 22, 444 B.C.
8:14	The Feast of Tabernacles observed: call to covenant renewal	Oct 11-17, 444 B.C.
9:1	The fasting and repentance of the people	Oct 20, 444 B.C.
13:6	Nehemiah returns to Babylon on official business	432 B.C.
13:7	Nehemiah's second return to Judah from Babylon	426 B.C.

Historical Background

The Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes) fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. while the Southern Kingdom (tribe of Judah and Simeon) fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The Northern Kingdom was scattered throughout the Assyrian empire while other conquered nations were imported to Israel for the purpose of promoting mixed-marriages, thereby creating the Samaritan race. The Southern Kingdom (including the majority of inhabitants of Jerusalem) was deported to Babylon.

When the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persian Empire in 539 B.C., Cyrus, in keeping with Jeremiah's prophecy that Judah would return to her promised land after a seventy year captivity in Babylon (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10), issued a royal decree permitting the Jews throughout his empire to return to Jerusalem to settle and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1:2-4). Roughly 50,000 Jews (including the prophets Haggai and Zechariah) chose to return to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 537 B.C. Shortly after the return, the altar was rebuilt and the Levitical sacrifices were reinstated. However, due to external opposition and internal

depression the rebuilding of the temple was halted. The temple rebuilding project laid dormant for 16 years, until God raised up the prophet Haggai in 520 B.C. to encourage the people to complete the rebuilding of the temple. Two months later, Zechariah was called by the Lord and began his prophetic ministry of encouraging the people to repent and return to God, so that He could return to them (1:3), and to complete their rebuilding of the temple. The ministry of these two godly prophets was instrumental in the temple's finally being completed in 516 B.C.

Ezra led a second return of exiled Jews to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. (see Ezra 7–10). Upon arriving in the city, Ezra discovered that the people had once again committed a terrible sin against the Lord by marrying foreign women and were in dire need of spiritual reformation. He immediately interceded and confessed the peoples' sin and urged the remnant to return to their covenant obligations and to put away their foreign wives and children. Fourteen years after Ezra's return, Nehemiah himself journeyed to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city (444 B.C.). Like Ezra, Nehemiah urged the people to return to their covenant obligations in both their spiritual and social lives. In an amazing display of faith and dependence upon God, Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem in a mere 52 days.

Outline

I. The Rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem by Nehemiah 1:1–7:73

A. Nehemiah's Return to Jerusalem 1:1–2:20

1. The report of Hanani concerning conditions in Jerusalem 1:1-3
2. The reaction of Nehemiah 1:4-11
 - a. His mourning 1:4
 - b. His prayer 1:5-11
 - 1) Adoration 1:5
 - 2) Confession 1:6-7
 - 3) Petition 1:8-11
 - a) His reminder to God: 1:8-10
 - b) His request of God: 1:11
3. The request of Nehemiah and decree by Artaxerxes 2:1-8
4. The return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem 2:9-20
 - a. His arrival in Jerusalem 2:9-11
 - b. His inspection of the ruins walls of Jerusalem 2:12-16
 - c. His announcement of his plans to rebuild the wall 2:17-20
 - 1) The challenge issued 2:17
 - 2) The commitment of the people 2:18

3) The confrontation with Sanballat and Tobiah 2:19-20

B. Nehemiah's Rebuilding of the Walls 3:1–7:4

1. His organization: the work assigned by divisions 3:1-32
 - a. The repairers about the Sheep Gate 3:1-2
 - b. The repairers about the Fish Gate 3:3-5
 - c. The repairers about the Old Gate 3:6-12
 - d. The repairers about the Valley Gate 3:13
 - e. The repairers about the Refuse Gate 3:14
 - f. The repairers about the Fountain Gate 3:15-25
 - g. The repairers about the Water Gate 3:26-27
 - h. The repairers about the Horse Gate 3:28
 - i. The repairers about the East Gate 3:29-30
 - j. The repairers about the Inspection Gate 3:31-32
2. His opposition: the work attacked 4:1–6:14
 - a. The opposition through ridicule 4:1-6
 - 1) The attack 4:1-3
 - 2) The answer: Nehemiah's prayer 4:4-6
 - b. The opposition through violence 4:7-9
 - 1) The attack 4:7-8
 - 2) The answer: Nehemiah's prayer and watchfulness 4:9
 - c. The opposition through discouragement 4:10-23
 - 1) The attack: a spirit of defeatism 4:10-12
 - 2) The answer: a remedy for defeatism 4:13-23
 - a) The encouragement of faith 4:13-14
 - b) The example of the peoples' work 4:15-23
 - d. The opposition through internal strife 5:1-19
 - 1) The complaint by the people 5:1-5
 - 2) The condemnation of the nobles 5:6-13
 - a) The words of Nehemiah against the nobles 5:6-11
 - b) The willingness of the nobles to repent 5:12-13
 - 3) The conduct of Nehemiah 5:14-19
 - e. The opposition against Nehemiah 6:1-19
 - 1) The terrorism 6:1-9
 - a) The false invitation by Sanballat and Geshem 6:1-4
 - b) The false accusation by Sanballat 6:5-9
 - 2) The treachery by Shemaiah 6:10-14
3. His obtaining the completion of the walls 6:15-19
 - a. The completion of the walls in 52 days 6:15
 - b. The confession of God's involvement in the work 6:16
 - c. The continued harassment of Nehemiah 6:17-19
4. His ordering of heightened security 7:1-4

- a. Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers, singers, and Levites as gatekeepers 7:1
- b. Nehemiah appoints his brother Hanani co-mayor of Jerusalem 7:2
- c. Nehemiah admonishes all the gatekeepers to exercise vigilance 7:3-4

C. Nehemiah's Register of the Returnees 7:5-73

1. The command by God to enroll the returnees by genealogies 7:5a
2. The discovery of the book of the genealogies 7:5b
3. The census of the returnees 7:6-73
 - a. The Israelites 7:6-38
 - 1) The leaders 7:6-7
 - 2) The people 7:8-38
 - b. The priests 7:39-42
 - c. The Levites 7:43-45
 - d. The Nethinim (temple servants) 7:46-56
 - e. The son's of Solomon's servants 7:57-60
 - f. The people of uncertain ancestry 7:61-65
 - g. The total number of returnees 7:66-69
 - h. The total contributions for the rebuilding 7:70-72
4. The cities of Israel settled by the seventh month 7:73

II. The Revival of the People Under Ezra 8:1-13:31

A. Renewal of the Covenant by Ezra 8:1-10:39

1. The reading of the Law 8:1-8
2. The response of the people 8:9-9:37
 - a. The remorse of the people 8:9
 - b. The reinstatement of the Feast of Tabernacles⁴ 8:10-18
 - 1) The proclamation of the feast 8:10-12
 - 2) The preparation of the booths (cf. Deut 16:13-17; Lev 23:39-44) 8:13-17
 - 3) The presentation of the Word of God 8:18
 - c. The repentance of the people 9:1-38
 - 1) The confession of the people 9:1-4
 - 2) The confession of the priests 9:5-38
 - a) Confessing God's majesty 9:5-6
 - b) Confessing God's choice of Abraham 9:7-8
 - c) Confessing God's care for Israel during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings 9:9-23
 - d) Confessing God's conquest and consignment of Canaan, and Israel's subsequent backsliding 9:24-31

⁴Gene Merrill, commenting on the the occasion of this feast, writes that it marked "New Year's Day (now called Rosh Hashanah)" ("Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Old Testament Explorer*, 358).

- e) Confessing personal sin 9:32-37
- f) Confessing commitment to obey God's laws 9:38

**Israel's Repentance Over Her Covenant Violations
(Nehemiah 10 and 13)**

1. We will separate ourselves from mixed marriages 10:28-30
2. We will not buy or sell on the Sabbath 10:31
3. We will support the temple with our offerings 10:32-39
[Chapters 11:1–13:9 Repopulating Jerusalem & Rededicating the Wall]
- 3.' They were not supporting the temple with their offerings 13:10-14
- 2.' They were working, buying, and selling on the Sabbath 13:15-22
- 1.' They were marrying women from Philistia, Ammon, and Moab 13:23-31

3. The renewal of the covenant 10:1-39
 - a. The people who signed the covenant renewal document 10:1-27
 - 1) The governor 10:1
 - 2) The priests 10:2-8
 - 3) The Levites 10:9-13
 - 4) The leaders of the people 10:14-27
 - b. The particulars of the covenant renewal document 10:28-39
 - 1) Regulations for family and civil life 10:28-31
 - 2) Regulations for spiritual life 10:32-39

B. Repopulating the Cities of the Land 11:1–12:26

1. The residents of Jerusalem 11:1-24
 - a. The residents for Jerusalem secured by lot 11:1-2
 - b. The residents of Jerusalem listed 11:3-24
2. The residents of the outlying towns 11:25-36
3. The register of priests and Levites 12:1-26

C. Rededicating the Wall 12:27-47

1. The preparation of the people for the dedication 12:27-30
2. The procession of the choir and dedication ceremonies 12:31-42
3. The praise and sacrifices of the people 12:43
4. The provisions for the temple personnel secured 12:44-47

D. Reforming the People 13:1-31

1. The exclusion of all foreigners from Israel 13:1-3
2. The expulsion of Tobiah from a storage-room in the temple 13:4-9
3. The restoration of temple personal and their rightful tithe 13:10-14
4. The restoration of Sabbath observance 13:15-22
 - a. The prohibition against labor on the Sabbath 13:15-18
 - b. The prohibition against trade on the Sabbath 13:19-22
5. The denunciation against mixed marriages 13:23-29
 - a. The prohibition against mixed marriages 13:23-27
 - b. The purging of the priesthood of mixed marriages 13:28-29
6. The summary of Nehemiah's reforms 13:30-31