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NEHEMIAH

*The city walls and people are rebuilt*

SETTING

Continues the story from the book of Ezra (445 - after 433 BC)

KEY VERSE

*"So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."*

6:15-16

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## INTRODUCTION

The book of Nehemiah is about the complete rebuilding of Jerusalem and the people after their exile in Babylon. We learn about leadership, lessons from history, prayer, and God's leadership in a way we can relate to.

The people began to repair the city wall in Ezra 4 but were stopped by the Persian king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah asks the same king for permission to continue repairing the wall.

### Structure

Ch. 1-7: Nehemiah rebuilds the wall. There was a lot of adversity, which means that Nehemiah has to be tactical and practical to finish the project (446-445 BC).

Ch. 8-10: Ezra rebuilds the people. They read from the law and officially returned to God.

Ch. 11: Nehemiah rebuilds the community

Ch. 12: The wall is inaugurated (after 433 BC)

Ch. 13: Nehemiah's reforms, incl. the dissolution of mixed marriages (after 433 BC, before chapter 12).

The exile is over, the people have returned, the temple and the wall have been rebuilt, and they committed themselves to the law again. The only thing missing is the king, and the next king in line is Jesus. In addition, the book ends with some episodes that show that the people are not completely reformed yet, despite Nehemiah's reforms. Rebirth is necessary, and it came 400 years later.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Biblical person** | **Biblical incident** | **Persian king** | **Period** |
|  | Jerusalem destroyed + exile |  | 586 |
| Daniel | Return: 539, Temple began: 536 | Cyrus | 559-530 |
|  |  | Cambyses | 530-522 |
|  |  | Gaumata | 522 |
| Haggai  Zechariah | Temple completed: 516 | Darius I | 522-486 |
| Esther |  | Xerxes I | 486-464 |
| Ezra | Comes to Jerusalem in 458 | Artaxerxes I | 464-424 |
|  | The wall construction has started and stopped |
| Nehemiah | Nehemiah comes: 445 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Chapter** | **Event** |
| 539-516 | Ezra 1-6 | The temple was rebuilt |
| 458 | Ezra 7-8 | Ezra brings gold, silver, and equipment for the temple |
|  | Ezra 9-10 | Ezra dissolves mixed marriages |
| 446-445 | Neh 1-7 | Nehemiah rebuilds the wall |
|  | Neh 8-10 | Ezra rebuilds the people |
|  | Nah 11 | Nehemiah rebuilds society |
| After 433 | Nah 12 | The wall is inaugurated |
| After 433 (before Ch. 12) | Nah 13 |  |

## THEMES

* The complete rebuilding of Jerusalem and its people after the exile. The exile is finally over.
* Leadership
* Prayer life
* How does God lead?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1:7 | *Nehemiah's prayer: «We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.»* | Ch. 8 | Ezra reads the law |
| 1:9a | *“… but if you return to me …”* | Ch. 9 | The people confess their sin |
| 1:9b | *«… and obey my commands …»* | Ch. 10 | The people want to live according to the law |

## CHAPTERS 4-6

### Resistance: 2:10, 19; 4:1, 7; 6:1, 16

*“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.”* Neh 2:10

*"But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?” "* Neh 2:19

*"When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,"* Neh 4:1

*"But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry."* Neh 4:7

*"When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates— "* Neh 6:1

*"When all our enemies heard about this …"* Neh 6:16

### Resistance from all corners:

*"But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry."* Neh 4:7

### Ch 6: “Scare” 5x

*“They were all trying to frighten us”* 6:9a

*“Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me.”* 6:14

*“Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.”* 6:19b

## EPILOGUE: 13:4-31

445-433 BC: Nehemiah's first period in Jerusalem

Returned later (before 424 BC) and discovered the conditions described here.

All this seems to have happened before 12:27.

Provides a background for 12:44 - 13:3

*“On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.”* 13:1-3

## WHY THIS ENDING?

The author thinks differently about chronology and happy endings and did not care about this.

The covenant that has been made must be demonstrated in practice. (Although chronologically, it happened before…)

He moved it here because the structure, especially in chapters 8-10, was more important (if it happened at the time).

He wanted readers to be left with a challenge rather than a happy ending. Not complacency and relaxation, but be on guard.

## WHAT IS THE LAST MISSING THING?

* People
* Temple
* Wall
* The law
* ….. Jesus!

## 7 PRINCIPLES FOR ANY PROJECT (Rick Warren)

1. MAKE IT SIMPLE. Organize around natural groups that already exist; don't create an organization if you don't need to. If it ain't broke, don't try to fix it.

2. PARTICIPATION. Work with those who want to work and ignore those who don't. Be thankful for those who show up.

3. DELEGATION. Divide the main goal into smaller tasks. Create clear job descriptions. Get the right person in the right place. Delegation is more than passing on the work.

4. MOTIVATION. Help others to own the project. Make it as effortless as possible.

5. COOPERATION. A key principle for good organization.

6. ADMINISTRATION. Have an overview and manage the project by walking around.

7. APPRECIATION. Give recognition; know people's names. Care.

## NEHEMIAH AND GOD'S LEADERSHIP

1:4 – 2:1 Praying for four months for an opportunity.

*“For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”* 1:4

2:5 Praying along the way and in the middle of the moment.

*"Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king…"* 2:4b-5a

2:8 Recognize later that it was God who did it.

*“And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests.”* 2:8

2:12-18 Waiting to mention God until he had gained more insight.

*“I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.”* 2:12

*“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king* *had said to me.”* 2:17-18

4:15 Understand that God uses humans.

*“When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.”* 4:15

7:5 God put it on his heart to register the people.

*“So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families.”* 7:5

Through prayer, mind, heart, and contacts.