

The Book of Nehemiah

Author:	Nehemiah – cupbearer to kings
Date/Location:	445-425 B.C. – Israel
Genre:	Historical Narrative
Length:	13 chapters
Key Passages:	4:6; 8:8

Contents:

How the Persians helped Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to lead the rebuilding of the city walls.

Theme and Purpose:

The book of Nehemiah continues the history of the Jews who returned from exile. Nehemiah gave up his position as cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the Persian king, to become governor of Jerusalem and lead the people in repairing the city walls. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries (see Neh. 8:2, 9), were both men of God but served Yahweh in different capacities. While Ezra was a priest and involved more with the religious restoration of returning Remnant, Nehemiah was a layman and served in a political capacity as governor in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Key Words:

With the rebuilding of the walls the key element, the key words are “wall” and “walls,” used some 33 times and “build,” “building,” “rebuilding,” etc., is found more than 20 times.

Outline:

Nehemiah divides into two sections:

- I. *The Rebuilding of the Walls (1-7)*
 - A. Preparation for Rebuilding (1-2)
 - B. Rebuilding (3-7)
- II. *The Restoration of the People (8-13)*
 - A. The Renewal of the Covenant (8-10)
 - B. The Obedience of the People to the Covenant (11-13)

8:1-3 *And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.*

Chronology of Ezra:

Event	Year	Reference
Cyrus king of Persia captures Babylon	539 b.c.	Dan. 5:30–31
First year of King Cyrus; issues proclamation freeing Jewish exiles to return	538–537	Ezra 1:1–4
Jewish exiles, led by Sheshbazzar, return from Babylon to Jerusalem	537?	Ezra 1:11
Altar rebuilt	537	Ezra 3:1–2
Temple rebuilding begins	536	Ezra 3:8
Adversaries oppose the rebuilding	536–530	Ezra 4:1–5
Temple rebuilding ceases	530–520	Ezra 4:24
Temple rebuilding resumes (2nd year of Darius)	520	Ezra 5:2; cf. Hag. 1:14
Temple construction completed (6th year of Darius)	516	Ezra 6:15
Ezra departs from Babylon to Jerusalem (arrives in 7th year of Artaxerxes)	458	Ezra 7:6–9
Men of Judah and Benjamin assemble at Jerusalem	458	Ezra 10:9
Officials conduct three-month investigation	458–457	Ezra 10:16–17

Chronology of Nehemiah:

Event	Month/Day	Year	Reference
Hanani brings Nehemiah a report from Jerusalem (20th year of Artaxerxes I)		445–444 b.c.	1:1
Nehemiah before King Artaxerxes	1	445	2:1
Nehemiah arrives to inspect Jerusalem walls		445	2:11
Wall is finished	6/25	445	6:15
People of Israel gather	7	445	7:73–8:1
People of Israel celebrate Feast of Booths	7/15–22	445	8:14
People of Israel fast and confess sins	7/24	445	9:1
Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem (32nd year of Artaxerxes I)		433–432	5:14; 13:6

Questions:

How can we relate to this period in Israel's history? What are ways that we have similar circumstances as Ezra and Nehemiah?

Have the Scriptures ever affected you the way it affected Israel in this period?

What difference does the death & resurrection of Jesus make when it comes to rebuilding the temple and the city? How does this account encourage you in the gospel?