

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a stone wall, likely made of rough-hewn, reddish-brown stones. The wall runs vertically along the right side of the image. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on the left and center portions of the image.

NEHEMIAH

REBUILDING A CITY PART 2

BIBLE STUDIES FOR ASHFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

From Genesis onwards the historical books have traced the rise and fall of the nation of Israel. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah bring the story to an end. (The rest of the Old Testament contains 'Wisdom Literature'-books like Job, Psalms and Proverbs-and the words of the prophets, like Joel, Amos and Isaiah.)

At the conclusion of 2 Kings/ 2 Chronicles the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were in a state of misery and desolation. Their ingratitude to God, and their constant backsliding and rebellion at last resulted in their defeat and captivity; northern Israel to Assyria, southern Judah to Babylon. Israel never returned.

In mercy to the faithful remnant of Judah, God had promised (Jer 25:11-12), that after seventy years he would restore them to their own country. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell that story.

Although they were possibly originally two separate documents (see Neh 1:1), Ezra and Nehemiah were combined as one in the earliest Hebrew manuscripts. The oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) also treat Ezra and Nehemiah as one book.

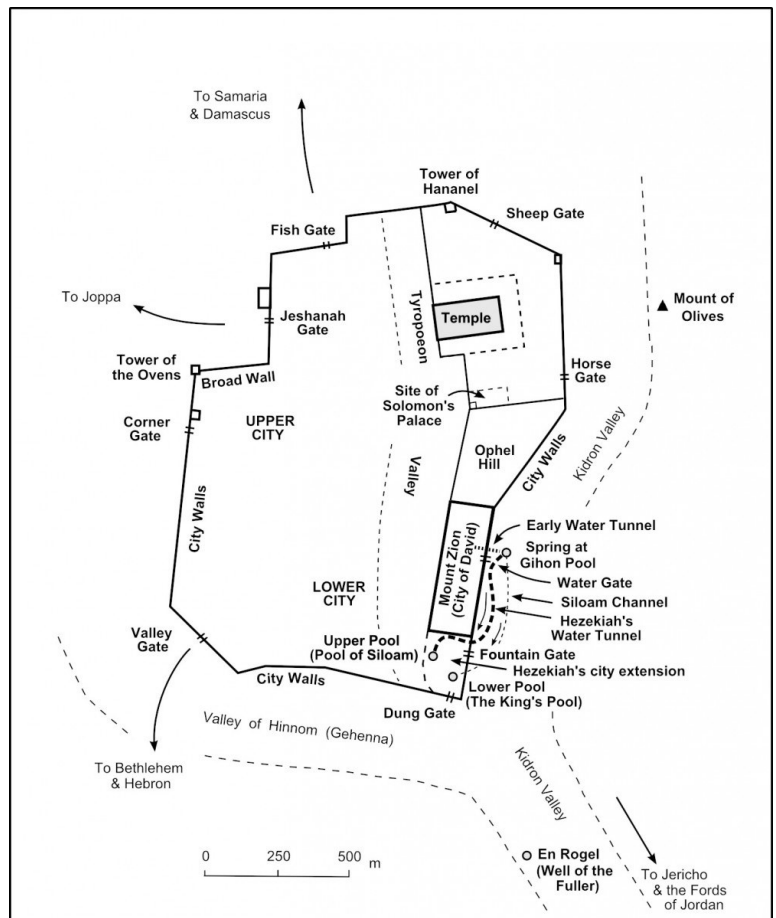
DATING

Date	Event	Reference
539 BC	Capture of Babylon by Cyrus of Persia	Dan 5:30
537	Return under Sheshbazzar	Ezr 1:11
	Building of altar	Ezr 3:1
536	Work on temple begun	Ezra 3:8
536-530	Opposition during Cyrus' reign	Ezr 4:1-5
530-520	Work on temple ceased	Ezr 4:24
520	Work on temple renewed under Darius	Ezr 5:2; Hag 1:14
516	Temple completed	Ezr 6:15
458	Ezra departs from Babylon and arrives in Jerusalem	Ezr 7:6-9
	Investigation of committee	Ezr 10:16-17
445	Twentieth year of Artaxerxes 1	Neh 1:1
	Nehemiah approaches King	Neh 2:1
	Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem	Neh 2:11
	Completion of wall	Neh 6:15
	Public assembly and feast of tabernacles	Neh 7:73-8:14
433	32nd year of Artaxerxes	
	Nehemiah's recall and return	Neh 5:14; 13:6

NEHEMIAH 1-4: REBUILDING THE WALLS

1. Read Deuteronomy 29:24 to 30:6. As Israel is about to enter the Promised Land, what warning does God give? What promise does God make?
2. Read Nehemiah 1. The book of Nehemiah is written a little like a diary. In chapter 1, what do we learn about Nehemiah, the man?
3. Summarize Nehemiah's request to God.
4. What is the required starting point for Israel's new relationship with God (v.9)?
5. Read Nehemiah 2. What does Nehemiah want to do, and why?
6. What are Sanballat and Tobiah worried about? (v.10) Keep your eye on these guys right through the book!
7. What is Nehemiah's confidence of success based on (vv.18, 20)?

Chapter 3 summarizes the building of the wall around Jerusalem, which is described in more detail from chapters 3-6:15. **Skim through Nehemiah 3.** It's a long and detailed account of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. As you read, imagine you're on a tour of a building site. You begin at the sheep gate, move past the towers, the Fish gate, and the Valley Gate. (Spare a thought for the builders at the Dung Gate.) You'll read the details of the doors, the bolts, and the beams. Notice the tour ends at the Sheep Gate, where it began.



8. Which people did this repair work? Was there anyone who refused to help?

Most church working bees struggle to get more than half a dozen people involved. What does the list of names tell you about the attitude of the Israelites?

9. **Read Nehemiah 4.** What are Sanballat and Tobiah's objections in 4:1-5?
10. Is Nehemiah's prayer in verse 4 reasonable? How does he perceive the situation?
11. In what ways have Sanballat and Tobiah angered God?
12. What two threats emerge to hamper the completion of the wall? How do the Israelites respond to these threats? (9, 14)?
13. Some churches study the book of Nehemiah before they launch a building program, and assume that because God was behind Nehemiah's rebuilding project, he'll back up our modern day schemes-if only we have enough faith. What is wrong with this approach to God's promises?

PRAYER IDEAS:

Confess to God the times you have abandoned his ways. Thank him for his promises to those who believe. Thank God for his goodness and faithfulness to his people. Ask that God might strengthen your commitment to doing his work in the world. Pray that God will honour his name and bring his enemies to account. Pray that you will always recall the greatness and awesomeness of God when you face opposition. Thank God for the fulfilment of all of his promises in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

PRAYER POINTS:

NEHEMIAH 5-7: RELEARNING GOD'S LAW

1. **Read Nehemiah 5.** Israel's attacks have always come from the inside as much as from the outside. How have they been abusing each other?

What is Nehemiah's proposed solution (vv.9-11)?

2. How does the situation get resolved (vv.12-13)?
3. **PONDER:** 'Usury' is extracting unfair interest on a loan, taking advantage of a weaker party. The Israelite nobles are taking advantage of their countrymen in a way that even their enemies would have been ashamed of! Do Christians today sin in this way?
4. Why wouldn't Nehemiah accept the food allowance of the governor?
5. For what purpose does Nehemiah want God to remember his deeds (v.19)?

6. **Read 1 Peter 5:1-6.** How has Christ illustrated the fact that leadership is sacrificial?

How should Christian leaders today reflect this?

7. **PONDER:** In your own church and ministries, are there any ways in which the leaders are placing too heavy a burden on those whom they lead?

What can be done about this?

8. **Read 6:1-14.** What strategy do Sanballat and Tobiah use now to try to trap Nehemiah?

What does Nehemiah do?

9. **Read Nehemiah 6:15-7:4.** The completion of the Jerusalem city wall took 52 days of hard work. Who is afraid now? Why?

10. Internal troubles arise again from the Jewish nobles. What potential problem exists?

11. What kind of men does Nehemiah appoint to protect the completed wall?

12. **Skim through Ch 7.** Verses 61 and 64 highlight an important point. Why is it so important that these people prove their lineage?

13. **PONDER:** God's promise to restore his penitent people has been fulfilled. But is their repentance genuine?

How would you recognize genuine repentance?

PRAYER IDEAS:

Pray that God will enable you to treat your fellow believers with love and generosity, not using them for your own gain. Pray for your leaders, that they will be humble, generous, and self-sacrificing. Pray that they will also be well provided for by those they serve. Ask God to strengthen your trust in his word, by which we can know the truth. Pray that God will protect your church groups from disunity and 'serving two masters'. Thank God that he kept his promise to restore the people of Israel to its own land at that time.

PRAYER POINTS:

NEHEMIAH 8-9: REMEMBERING GOD'S GOODNESS

1. **Read Nehemiah 8.** There is a great sense of occasion here as Ezra reads from the Book of the Law of Moses. How do the people respond in verse 6?

What do the Levites do?

2. The Israelites weep when they hear God's word. Why? Could it be connected with the events of 6:17-19?
3. **PONDER:** If Israel has fallen short of God's standards, why does Nehemiah insist that this is a day for rejoicing rather than mourning?
4. What happens during the feast of the seventh month? What is the festival celebrating (see Leviticus 23:33-43, esp. v.43)? Why do they live in 'booths'?
5. **PONDER:** How does your reaction to the Word of God compare to that of the Israelites?
6. **Read Nehemiah 9.** Summarise the point of the Levites' sermon in a paragraph (verse 28 will help).
7. What marks of repentance do you see throughout the chapter?
8. Even when enjoying the blessings of the Promised Land, Israel returns to sin. **Read Romans 7:18-25.** How is the Christian experience of sin similar to that of Israel?

How is it different?

PRAYER IDEAS:

Praise God for his Word, which reveals to us our sinfulness and his steadfast love. Ask God to make you thankful for and obedient to his Word. Pray that you and your church will learn the lessons of Israel's repeated disobedience and lapses into sin.

PRAYER POINTS:

NEHEMIAH 10-13: REPENTING FOR REAL?

Read 9:38-10:39. The people of Israel agree to keep the commandments of the Law—and they put it writing!

1. What different groups agree to sign the agreement? What do they agree to do?
2. **Read Jesus' words in Luke 3:8.** How will we know whether Israel's repentance is genuine?

How can Christians encourage each other to “bear fruits in keeping with repentance”?

3. **Skim through 11:1-12:26.** The walls are finished, but Jerusalem is still virtually a ghost town (this was first mentioned in 7:4). Most people prefer life in the surrounding villages. What does this suggest about them?
4. Why is it important for people to live in Jerusalem? (see vv.6, 8, 14, 19).

Read 12: 27-47. Nehemiah describes a great celebration as the finished wall is finally dedicated.

5. There is repeated mention of King David in chapter 12. Why? (see 1 Chr 16:8-36).
6. Think back to the written promises the people made and sealed in chapter 10. From vv. 44-47, do they seem to be keeping them?
7. **Read Nehemiah 13.** After 12 years in Jerusalem as Governor, Nehemiah pays a return visit to King Artaxerxes in Babylon (v.6). What happens while he is away?

What specifically has gone wrong (see vv. 10-11; 15-16; 23-24).

8. How does Nehemiah react to this sin (vv. 11, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, 28, 30)? Summarise this reaction.

9. Is Nehemiah's plea for God to remember his deeds a prayer for acknowledgment, or for pardon?

10. **PONDER:** How do you react to sin? Do you feel the same zeal for God that Nehemiah has? In what ways would it be appropriate/ inappropriate to respond as Nehemiah does?

11. For all the good intentions of the people for a fresh start, how have the books of Ezra and Nehemiah finished?

12. The book of Hebrews takes up the issue of "the problem with Israel". **Read Hebrews 8:7-13.** What was wrong with the old covenant? (See also Romans 8:3)

How does the new covenant differ from the old one? (See also Heb 9:15)

13. God was incredibly patient with Israel. Why did he persevere (Jer 31:3)?

PRAYER IDEAS:

Commit yourself to being faithful to the Lord in both word and deed. Pray that God will establish himself and serving him as the first priority of our hearts and minds. Ask God to let us know the "joy of our salvation" (Ps 51:12). Ask that God would teach you to see things his way, from his perspective, and to be horrified by sin as Nehemiah was. Thank God that in Christ's death, he remembers our sins no longer (Heb 8:12).

PRAYER POINTS: