

Nehemiah 1-7

Context

- Probably written or spoken by Nehemiah and compiled or written down by Ezra
 - The book is written in the first person spoken from Nehemiah's standpoint
 - The Talmud credits authorship to Ezra and was originally one book with Ezra.
 - Ezra was a scribe and contemporary of Nehemiah. His job as scribe would fit as the one writing down the story or history as spoken by another.
- Nehemiah's name means "The LORD Has Comforted." Nahum is a shortened form of Nehemiah.
 - Nechemyah
- Nehemiah was the cup bearer to Artaxerxes I king of the Achaemenid or Persian empire.
 - Possibly a eunuch
 - For
 - Present in front of the queen
 - No wife or children mentioned
 - Shemaiah is hired against Nehemiah and suggests that they meet in the temple. Nehemiah considers this a sin. "Should someone like me go into the temple to save his life?"
 - Against
 - Eunuchs weren't allowed in the temple. They were considered unclean. Highly unlikely the Jews would accept Nehemiah as a leader.
 - Cup bearers serve wine at the king's table – tasting it first to ensure quality and it isn't poisonous. Expected to be a good and tactful companion to the king. Just by being near the king and in frequent conversation with him, Nehemiah would have been on good terms with him and would have had significant influence. Highly educated, probably Jewish nobility, possibly even royalty, although he's not mentioned in the direct genealogical line of kings. A prince, like Daniel.
- Dates
 - Story covers 445 - 431 BC
 - Probably written between 423 - 400 BC
 - Chronologically, the last historical book of the Old Testament
- Locations:
 - Susa in the Sousiane satrapy (winter capital of the Achaemenid empire)
 - Jerusalem in the Trans-Euphrates satrapy
- Book of Nehemiah is the second half of the Ezra-Nehemiah chiasm

3 roles

- Cup Bearer
- Wall Builder
- Governor

Summary of Nehemiah Chapters 1-7

Chapter 1

- Nehemiah, learns of Jerusalem's desolate condition – “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire. (v3)”
 - Artaxerxes had previously commanded that the rebuilding of Jerusalem should stop (Ezra 4:17-22)
 - ¹⁹ I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition. ²⁰ Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. ²¹ Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order. ²² Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?
- He mourns, fasts, and prays for some days
- Nehemiah's prayer (vv 5-11)
 - Address to the LORD
 - LORD, the God of Heaven (v5a)
 - Praise
 - the great and awesome God (v5b)
 - Recognition of the LORD's character as a promise keeper
 - who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments (v5c)
 - Petition for the LORD to hear his prayer regarding the Israelites
 - let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel (v6a)
 - Confession of the corporate sin of Israel
 - I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. (vv6b-7)
 - Reminder of the if->then promise given to Moses for Israel
 - “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, ⁹ but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’ (v8)
 - Reminder that the Israelites are the LORD's chosen people
 - They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand (v10)
 - Petition to hear his prayer
 - Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name (v11a)

- Asking for success by gaining favor from the king
 - Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man (v11b)
- Chiasm in Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:5

Chapter 2

- Nehemiah puts his plan into action and appears before King Artaxerxes with a long face. The king immediately notices his sadness. Sadness in front of the king could have been interpreted as dissatisfaction with the king. (Esther 4:2 – No one in mourning could enter the king’s gate)
- Nehemiah prays again and asks to be sent to the city of his ancestor’s tombs so he can rebuild it.
- Nehemiah is granted permission to go and asks for letters to the governors of the Trans-Euphrates satrapy for safe passage and to Asaf the supervisor of the royal forests for lumber for the gates of the fortress, the wall, and his house.
- The king agrees and sends army officers and cavalry to guard him on his journey.
- Fast forward a few months(?) and Nehemiah presents his letter to the governors of the satrapy and they aren’t very happy to see the Israelites gaining benefits.
 - Sanballat was either a Samaritan or a Moabite with a Babylonian name (San->Sin the Babylonian moon god). Samaria and Moab both have “Horon” towns that he could be from. Samaria was the capital of Israel and a frequent enemy of Judah/Jerusalem. Moab was also a frequent enemy of the Israelites.
 - His official Tobiah was an Ammonite probably lending more credence to Sanballat being a Moabite since, racially, they would be more likely to work together (Ammonites would have considered a Samaritan an Israelite and would have racial prejudices against them).
 - Pop quiz: Who founded Ammon and Moab?
- Stays in Jerusalem and sneaks out at night to inspect the walls.
- Convinces the Jewish leadership to start rebuilding again.
- Sanballat and his cronies come around mocking and ridiculing.

Chapter 3

The chapter lists the various groups and individuals who undertook the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. Each section of the wall is assigned to different families, priests, and craftsmen, emphasizing the collective effort of the community.

Chapter 4

- Sanballat and cronies continue their mocking attacks
- Nehemiah responds with prayer
- The people build the wall half-way up
- Sanballat and cronies plot to stir up trouble
- Nehemiah responds with prayer and posts guards
- Sanballat and cronies plot to sneak attack the workers
- Nehemiah increases the guard at the weak points of the wall. He encourages the workers.
 - “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” (v14)

- The work continues from dawn to dusk with half the men as guards and the other half as workers with swords by their sides.
 - “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!”

Chapter 5

- The people complain about not being able to feed their families
 - Mortgage property to get grain during famine
 - Borrow money and sell children to pay taxes
- Nehemiah admonishes the nobles and officials for charging interest to their own people (this was against Torah law). The property and interest money is given back to the people.
- Later, when Nehemiah is appointed governor of the satrapy, he doesn't tax the people as is his right for his “governor's food allowance” – even though he is feeding more than 150 people at his governor's table every day.
- “Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.” (19)

Chapter 6

- The opposition intensifies, with Sanballat and cronies attempting to lure Nehemiah into a trap, but he refuses.
- They also spread false rumors of rebellion and hire prophets to prophesy against him (Shemaiah tries to get him to go into the temple).
- Nehemiah prays for strength and continues the work.
- Despite numerous attempts to intimidate him, the wall is completed in fifty-two days.
- The enemies and surrounding nations are all afraid and lose confidence at the news of the wall being rebuilt because they realize that God is helping the Israelites again.

Chapter 7

With the wall finished, Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers, singers, and Levites to their respective duties. He instructs Hanani and Hananiah to safeguard the city. An extensive list of the exiles and their property who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel is documented, reaffirming the community's commitment to the city's restoration. 42,360 people returned (Mill Creek x 2, ½ Everett) to fill the whole nation of Israel.