



The Book of Nehemiah

Introduction

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND UP TO NEHEMIAH

A. Israel's United Kingdom

1. Saul began his reign as king between the years (from Adam) 3,124 and 3,126 (1 Samuel 9-10).
2. For the most part, the kingdom remained united under the entirety of David's reign.
3. Solomon's reign ended with his death between the years 3,244 and 3,246 from Adam (1 Kings 11:41-43).
4. A division in the kingdom was promised in Solomon's lifetime but would not become reality until the reign of his son Rehoboam.
5. All things considered, there was about 120 years of time in which Israel dwelt as a united kingdom.

B. The Dividing of the Kingdom

1. The reason for the division of the kingdom
 - a. Solomon's son Rehoboam took the throne about the time of Solomon's death in 3,244 (1 Kings 14:21; 2 Chronicles 12:13).
 - b. The people requested Rehoboam to lighten their yoke but Rehoboam threatened that his reign would be more burdensome than his father Solomon's (1 Kings 12:1-19).
 - c. As a result, the kingdom split with all tribes, except Judah and Benjamin, making Jeroboam their king (1 Kings 12:20-24).
 - d. The tribes which made Jeroboam their king became known as Israel or simply as the northern kingdom and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became known as Judah or the southern kingdom.
2. The timeframe of the divided kingdom
 - a. Rehoboam began to reign in Judah and Jeroboam began to reign in Israel about the year 3,244 from Adam (1 Kings 14:21; 2 Chronicles 12:13; 1 Kings 12:20).
 - b. Hoshea was Israel's last king and his reign ended about the year 3,502 from Adam when taken into captivity (2 Kings 17:1-6).
 - c. Zedekiah was Judah's last king and his reign ended around year 3,633 when taken into captivity (2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21).
 - d. That said, the kingdom of Israel survived nearly 260 years and the kingdom of Judah survived around 390 years before going into captivity at different times and to different lands.
 - e. From the beginning of Saul's reign to the end of Zedekiah's gives the nation of Israel (eventually only the southern kingdom) about 509 years in total as a kingdom ruling in their own land.



C. The Captivity of Israel

1. Hoshea was the king of Israel when taken into captivity.
2. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered and carried to Assyria about the year 722 from Adam (2 Kings 17:23).
3. The people of Israel were separated and spread out in different regions and cities (2 Kings 15:11).
4. The scripture does not record any historical account of Israel ever returning out of this captivity and back to their land.

D. The Captivity of Judah

1. Judah was taken captive in multiple stages beginning around 586 years from Adam's creation (2 Chronicles 36:5-21; 2 Kings 24:8-16).
2. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came into Judah and conquered the kings and people and brought them to Babylon as captives.
3. The scripture records that Judah would and did remain in captivity in Babylon for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-12).

E. Judah's Returns from Captivity

1. The first return (see Ezra 1-6)
 - a. After seventy years, about the year 539 from Adam, God stirred the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia, to build God a house in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1).
 - b. Zerubbabel led this return, and the purpose was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). 49,697 people made this journey (Ezra 2:64-65, Nehemiah 7:66-67).
 - c. It is likely between the first and second return that the account of Esther takes place (between Ezra 6 and 7).
2. The second return (see Ezra 7-10)
 - a. This return took place in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia (Ezra 7:1, 7).
 - b. Ezra was the leader and about 1,700 male Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.
 - c. The main focus of this return was to rebuild the spirituality of the Jews and restore proper ministration of the temple.
3. The third return (see Nehemiah 1-6)
 - a. We hesitate to officially call this a return as Nehemiah is the only person mentioned by name to have made the trip.
 - b. Nehemiah left Shushan and returned to Jerusalem during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (thirteen years after Ezra's return—compare Ezra 7:7 to Nehemiah 1:1).
 - c. The purpose of Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem was to rebuild the city (Nehemiah 2:3, 5), but more specifically the wall about the city (Nehemiah 2:17).



II. THE BASICS OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

A. The Book's Statistics

1. The divisions of the book
 - a. Chapters = 13
 - b. Verses = 406
 - c. Words = 10,480
2. The keys to the book
 - a. The book does not necessarily have words that stand out as unique or overwhelmingly prominent, but words like Jerusalem (thirty-eight times), repaired (thirty-five times), wall (thirty-four times), and gate (twenty-seven times) tell the story of the book in a few words.
 - b. A careful reading of the book of Nehemiah will show that Nehemiah was a man given to prayer. In fact, there are twelve instances of prayer covering fifty-two verses, or about 13% of the book's verses (see Nehemiah 1:5-11; Nehemiah 2:4; Nehemiah 4:4-5, 9; Nehemiah 5:19; Nehemiah 6:9, 14; Nehemiah 9:5-38; Nehemiah 13:14, 22, 29, 31).

B. The Book's Author

1. The opening verse introduces Nehemiah as the author (Nehemiah 1:1).
2. He is simply identified as Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah. Hachaliah is only mentioned twice in scripture and both times as being the father of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:1; Nehemiah 10:1).
3. Further in the book, we learn that Nehemiah is also identified as the Tirshatha (Nehemiah 8:9) and that Tirshatha is akin to a governor (Nehemiah 12:26).
4. For reasons that we will discuss later, it is believed that this Nehemiah is the one referenced in Ezra 2:2 as having been involved in the first return under the leadership of Zerubbabel. If this is true, he returned to the land of captivity after having spent some time in the land with Zerubbabel only to return to Jerusalem when he learned of the lack of progress.
5. Although Nehemiah was somewhat of an ambiguous individual, he was a mighty leader and one that greatly feared God.

C. The Book's Historical Inclusion

1. A contextual study of the book of Nehemiah reveals that much of the middle of the book is a recounting of historical events.
2. Nehemiah's departure from current events began when he read a register from the time of Zerubbabel's return (see Nehemiah 7:5).
3. Nehemiah's return to current events takes place at the discussion of the dedication of the wall (see Nehemiah 12:27).
4. In order to get a better understanding of this assessment, consider the following:



- a. Nehemiah 1-6 is written from the first-person by Nehemiah as indicated by his many uses of *I*; however, Nehemiah 7:6 through Nehemiah 12:31 contain no first-person pronouns by Nehemiah.
- b. Nehemiah's departure from the present begins with a set of verses (Nehemiah 7:6-73) closely matching a listing of those who went up with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1-70).
- c. This historical reference continues into Nehemiah chapter 8 which closely aligns to the historical events covered in Ezra 3:1-7. These events took place within the first two years of the first return led by Zerubbabel.
- d. There is no break in the context when reading consecutively through this middle portion of Nehemiah suggesting that a historical record continues to be the focus until the discussion returns to the wall and its dedication (see Nehemiah 12:27).
- e. As such, Nehemiah 12:27 marks the return to current events. When the passage returns to the present, there is a finished wall in need of being dedicated unto the Lord. As further evidence of this return to the present, Nehemiah begins again to write in the first-person shortly thereafter (see Nehemiah 12:31).
- f. All that being said, beginning with Nehemiah 7:6 and ending at the completion of Nehemiah 12:26, the passage can, in a way, be viewed as a very long parenthetical statement or thought.
 - (1) One could read Nehemiah 1:1—Nehemiah 7:5, skip to Nehemiah 12:27, and read through the remainder of the book and have a complete account of the rebuilding of the wall and of Nehemiah's work in returning to Jerusalem.
 - (2) At the same time, God inserted Nehemiah 7:6—Nehemiah 12:26 on purpose and this passage provides much detail we need surrounding the return with Zerubbabel and the events that led to the need for Nehemiah to return and accomplish what had been left undone by those who were in the land.

D. The Book's Outline

1. Nehemiah's time in the palace in Shushan (Nehemiah 1:1-11)
2. Nehemiah's preparations to answer the call to build (Nehemiah 2:1-20)
3. The rebuilding of the wall and the oppositions faced (Nehemiah 3:1-32; Nehemiah 4:1-23; Nehemiah 5:1-19; Nehemiah 6:1-19)
4. Nehemiah's preparations and departure for Persia (Nehemiah 7:1-5; see Nehemiah 13:6)
5. Nehemiah's recounting of historical events (Nehemiah 7:6-73; Nehemiah 8:1-18; Nehemiah 9:1-38; Nehemiah 10:1-39; Nehemiah 11:1-36; Nehemiah 12:1-26)
6. The dedication of the wall (Nehemiah 12:27-47)
7. Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem and frustrations over what he saw (Nehemiah 13:1-31)