

Week of December 12 - 18

Nehemiah Overview

Nehemiah was the cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes and had learned that the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem were suffering and that the walls of Jerusalem were still ruined and the gates burned down. He asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. Artaxerxes sent him to Judah as the governor to rebuild the wall. He also sent letters of support and provided timber from his forest to build the wall. Once there, Nehemiah opposed the Samaritans, Ammonites, Arabs, and Philistines and rebuilt the walls within 52 days.

Nehemiah 2 Nehemiah's Preparations and Journey to Jerusalem

After four months of prayer and with God's help, Nehemiah asked the king for authority to return to Jerusalem to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. King Artaxerxes approved his request and gave him letters of authority and protection. Upon arrival in Jerusalem, Nehemiah quietly inspected the walls at night and challenged the elders to begin the rebuilding project. Opposition began at once by the surrounding nations. When Sanballat's, Tobiah, and Gesham discovered Nehemiah's plans, they mocked and ridiculed him to stop the rebuilding of the wall. Nehemiah responded saying that the God of heaven would help them rebuild and that they would not be allowed to participate.

Nehemiah 3 Restoring the Gates and Walls

Beginning at the Sheep Gate near the Temple, through which all the sacrifices were brought in and led to the altar, rebuilding began at the fish gate through which fishermen passed, then the Old Gate in the ancient part of the city, then the Valley Gate, the Dung Gate which was used to carry filth and refuse from the city, the Gate of the Fountain, the Water Gate, the Horse Gate, the East Gate which faces the rising sun and from which God's glory departed during the exile, and the Muster or Inspection Gate in which the judges sat to settle disputes and controversies. Then they completed the circle back to the Sheep Gate, where the chapter ends.

The high priest Eliashib led the work by rebuilding the Sheep Gate. Workers on the Old Gate and wall included rulers, perfume makers, and women. The restorers of the Fountain Gate and wall included nobility and Levites. Temple servants worked at the Water Gate and wall, and the priests repaired the Horse Gate. Residents near the East Gate and wall repaired it. A goldsmith and merchants rebuilt the Muster Gate. People of all occupations participated, including whole families, and despite opposition, they cooperated in their effort to do the Lord's work.

Nehemiah 4 Opposition to God's Work

The opposition from outsiders turned to rage as the wall's reconstruction began. Nehemiah was aware of the enemies' efforts to stop the work and prayed to God for protection. The people worked with all their hearts.

As the opposition became more outraged, and they attempted to disrupt the work, the people returned to prayer. Nehemiah says, "We made our prayer, and set a watch." Nehemiah organized a type of civil defense where one-half of the people worked while one-half guarded the workers. Additionally, they carried their weapons with them all the time. He encouraged

the Jews to remember their "great and awesome" God who stood beside them to protect them against their enemy and fight their battles.

Nehemiah 5 Economic Oppression

A new problem arose that threatened the building project as much as the threat of the enemies. The rich were exacting usury from the poorer families to such an extent as to make them slaves to the rich. The absence of food caused the poorer Jews to mortgage their homes and sell their children into servitude to pay off their debt. They complained that their creditors were fellow Jews. Consequently, Nehemiah set up a meeting and charged the creditors with abuse. Nehemiah defended his conduct during the twelve years he was there as governor. He did not govern out of greed but placed the building of the wall above his interests. By sharing his wealth daily, he set an example for the people. They agreed to return the confiscated possessions. As a result, work on the wall continued with great joy.

Nehemiah 6 Final Intimidation

Opposition to the work on the wall by Nehemiah continued. With the work near completion, out of desperation, Nehemiah's enemies invited him four times to meet them at Ono, a site located between Judah and Samaria. He refused because the Lord's work was more important. Sanballat stepped up his intimidation by charging him with sedition. Nehemiah responded with prayer as he always had in the past. Sanballat then hired Shemaiah and a prophetess to encourage Nehemiah to hide in the Temple because he might be assassinated that night. Nehemiah, however, recognized their intentions to trick him and prayed for God's justice.

The wall was finally completed after only fifty-two days because of the Lord's help.

Jerusalem's Wall in Nehemiah's Day

