

10-2018

A Biographical Study of Nehemiah

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ot_biographies



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "A Biographical Study of Nehemiah" (2018). *Old Testament Biographies*. 32.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ot_biographies/32

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the A Biographical Study of Individuals of the Bible at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Old Testament Biographies by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

Nehemiah

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. The news concerning the wall (chapter 1)
 - A. Learning—The information: In December of 446 B.C., Nehemiah learned of the pitiful stage of Jerusalem from a returning Jew named Hanani, his own brother (1:2; 7:2). The report broke his heart (1:3-4).
 - B. Lamenting—The intercession: Upon hearing this, Nehemiah began a time of confession and intercession (1:4-11).
 1. He addressed the God of heaven, a special title for God during the captivity (1:5).
 2. He identified with his people Israel and their sin (1:6).
 3. He acknowledged the righteousness of God in punishing his people (1:7).
 4. He reminded God of his promise to regather his people (1:8-10).
 5. He asked God to soften the heart of the king (1:11; see also Ezra 4:21).
- II. The request to build the wall (2:1-8)
 - A. In April of 445 B.C., after a prayer period of four months, Nehemiah asked the king to . . . “Send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers’ sepulchers, that I may build it” (2:5).
 - B. Artaxerxes agreed to give Nehemiah the necessary assistance.
- III. The necessity for the wall (2:9-20)—Soon after reaching Jerusalem, Nehemiah made a secret midnight ride around the city itself. The next morning he assembled Judah’s leaders and shared with them the burden of his heart (2:17-18).
 - A. His evaluation—“The wall and the gates are burned with fire.”
 - B. His exhortation—“Let us rise up and build!”
 - C. It may be concluded that there were at least two compelling reasons for building the wall:
 1. It was necessary for protection, to keep the outsiders out. This would protect against sneak attacks (7:1-3).
 2. It was necessary for separation, that is, to keep the insiders in. This would cut down on the growing worldliness of the Jews who had been associating freely with the surrounding pagan people.
- IV. The gates in the wall (3)—The various gates mentioned here are in themselves a beautiful picture summary of the Christian life:
 - A. The sheep gate—This speaks of the cross (Neh. 3:1; John 10:11).
 - B. The fish gate—This speaks of soul winning (Neh. 3:3; Matt. 4:19).
 - C. The old gate—This speaks of our old nature (Neh. 3:6; Rom. 6:1-23).
 - D. The valley gate—This speaks of sufferings and testing (Neh. 3:13; 2 Cor. 1:3-5).
 - E. The dung gate—This speaks of the works of the flesh (Neh. 3:14; Gal. 5:16-21).
 - F. The fountain gate—This speaks of the Holy Spirit (Neh. 3:15; John 7:27-30).

- G. The water gate—This speaks of the Word of God (Neh. 3:26; John 4:10-14)
- H. The horse gate—This speaks of the believer's warfare (Neh. 3:28; Eph. 6:10-17).
- I. The east gate—This speaks of the return of Christ (Neh. 3:29; Ezek. 43:1-2).
- J. The Miphkad gate—This was thought to be the judgment gate and therefore speaks of the judgment seat of Christ (Neh. 3:31; 1 Cor. 3:9-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).
- V. The opposition to the wall—"When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Neh. 2:10). A work for God will always be met by both human and Satanic opposition. These combined forces did their perverted best to halt the wall building. Many methods were employed to accomplish this.
 - A. Ridicule (4:1-3)
 - 1. "They laughed us to scorn."
 - 2. "Sanballat . . . mocked the Jews" (4:1).
 - 3. "Tobiah . . . said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (4:3).
 - B. Discouragement—"Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall" (4:10).
 - C. Conspiracy (4:7-8, 11)—"They were very wroth, and conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it" (4:7-8). "Our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease" (4:11).
 - D. Laziness—"Next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (3:5).
 - E. Internal strife—Some of the more well-to-do Jews were guilty of extortion toward their less fortunate countrymen (5:1-5).
 - F. Compromise (6:1-4)
 - 1. Nehemiah's enemies' proposal—"Come, let us meet together . . . But they thought to do me mischief" (6:2).
 - 2. Nehemiah's answer—"I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down" (6:3).
 - G. Slander—Sanballat spread vicious rumors that Nehemiah was actually plotting to become king and revolt against Persia (6:5-9).
 - H. Treachery (6:10-14)—"Shemaiah claimed to have a special revelation about a plot against Nehemiah's life and suggested that the Holy Place in the Temple would be the only safe place for Nehemiah. But the suggestion unmasked Shemaiah's treachery, since only the priests could enter the Holy Place (Num. 18:7). If

Nehemiah had done so, his testimony would have been ruined” (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 718).

- I. Outright fear (6:9, 14)—“They all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (Neh. 6:9).
- VI. The builder of the wall—Nehemiah
 - A. He set an unselfish example for all the people (5:14-18).
 1. During his entire 12-year ministry as governor, Nehemiah took no salary (5:14).
 2. In fact, he paid for the food consumed by 150 of his helpers (5:17-18).
 3. He worked hard on the wall himself (5:16).
 4. He loaned money to needy Jews without interest (5:10).
 - B. He displayed total confidence in God both during and following the building of the wall (4:14; 8:9-10).
 1. Before—“I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses” (4:14).
 2. After—“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (8:10).
 - C. He refused to compromise (2:20).
 - D. He prayed constantly (4:4-5, 9; 6:9).
 - E. He contended for the faith (4:16-23).
 1. Nehemiah assigned half the men to work, carrying building tools, and the other half to stand guard, carrying weapons.
 2. A trumpeter stood by Nehemiah’s side ready to sound the alarm at a moment’s notice.
 3. All the workers toiled from sunrise to sunset, not even taking time to wash their clothes.
- VII. Blessings of the completed wall—In spite of all the persecution and hardships, Nehemiah had the wall up and completed in early September, just days after they had begun (6:15-16). “It came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (6:16). It resulted in many blessings indeed, including:
 - A. The reading of the Word of God (8:1-8; 9:3)

1. Ezra stood and read it for six hours (8:3).
 2. He stood on a specially built wooden podium (8:4).
 3. Various Bible teachers helped the crowd to understand what was being read (8:8). “They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (8:8).
- B. The restoration of the feast of tabernacles (8:13-18)
- C. The prayer recitation of Israel’s history (9:6-38)—In this remarkable public prayer, the Levites summarized:
1. The creation of the world (9:6)
 2. The history of Israel
 - a. From Abraham to Moses (9:7-8)
 - b. From Moses to Joshua (9:9-23)
 - c. From Joshua to Judges (9:24-25)
 - d. From the Judges to the Captivity (9:26-30)
 - e. From the Captivity to Nehemiah’s time (9:31-37)
 3. The God of Israel
 - a. Creator (9:6)
 - b. Communicator (9:13)
 - c. Leader (9:12)
 - d. Sustainer (9:15, 21)
 - e. Forgiver of sins (9:16-17)
 - f. Instructor (9:20, 30)
- D. The ratification of a special covenant (9:38; 10:1-29)—“Because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it” (9:38).
1. They would not marry heathens.
 2. They would keep the Sabbath and holy days free from commercial activity.
 3. They would observe the sabbatical year.
 4. They would support the temple.
- E. The repopulating of the city of David—Lots were cast to bring one tenth of the country’s population into Jerusalem (11:1-2).
- F. The renunciation of sins
1. Of ungodly alliances (9:1-3; 13:3)
 2. Of untithed money (10:32-39; 12:44-47; 13:10-12)
 3. Of unlawful Sabbath work (10:31; 13:15-22)
 4. Of unequal marriages (10:30; 13:23, 25)
 5. Of unauthorized usage of the temple (13:1-10)

- a. Nehemiah's fantastic zeal and fearless actions helped bring into being all this repentance over sin.
 - b. Nehemiah had gone back to Persia for a while (13:6), but upon returning he discovered several very disquieting things:
 - (1) Eliashib, the temple high priest, had actually converted a storage room into a beautiful guest room for (of all people) Israel's enemy, Tobiah.
 - (2) Eliashib was the grandson of Joshua the high priest.
 - (3) Nehemiah ordered Tobiah to leave, and threw out all of belongings from the room (13:9).
 - (4) He then had to regather the temple choir, which had dissolved during his absence (13:10).
 - c. His last recorded act was to chase off Joiada (the very son of Eliashib, the high priest) because of his unlawful marriage to Sanballat's daughter (13:28).
- G. The rejoicing of all the remnant—When God's work is done in God's way, joy will follow. Note the various references to this.
- 1. The thanksgiving from within
 - a. The people sent presents to each other and ate festive meals. "All the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (8:12).
 - b. The Levitical choir sang and played with cymbals, psalteries, and harps (9:4; 12:27-28).
 - c. Nehemiah divided the people into two groups. Each walked in opposite directions upon the completed wall singing their songs of praise to God (12:31-39).
 - d. Ezra led a special corps of trumpet playing priests (12:25-37).
 - 2. The testimony from without—The results of all this was that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar off (12:43).

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Nehemiah was the younger contemporary of Ezra.
 - A. Ezra was a priest and Bible teacher. His main job concerned the purification of the people of Israel.
 - B. Nehemiah was a politician and builder. His main job concerned the protection of the people of Israel.
- II. His is the only completely autobiographical book in the Bible.
- III. His book marks the end of historical chronology in the Old Testament.

- IV. Nehemiah was the royal cupbearer for Artaxerxes, the king of Persia (Neh. 2:1).
- V. He led the final (of three) Jewish returns from Persia back to Judah.
 - A. Zerubbabel led the first (Ezra 3:8).
 - B. Ezra led the second (Ezra 7:1).
 - C. Nehemiah led the third (Neh. 2:9).
- VI. Nehemiah participated in the final of eight Israelite Old Testament revivals. These were:
 - A. During the days of Samuel (1 Sam. 7:3-6)
 - B. During the days of Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:5-7)
 - C. During the days of Asa (2 Chron. 14:1-6)
 - D. During the days of Joash and Jehoadah (2 Chron. 23:16-21)
 - E. During the days of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:3-14)
 - F. During the days of Josiah (2 Chron. 34:3-33)
 - G. During the days of Ezra (Ezra 10:1-19)
 - H. During the days of Nehemiah (Neh. 8:1—9:3)
- VII. He and Ezra made up the final of six famous Old Testament teams for God. These are:
 - A. Moses and Aaron
 - B. Joshua and Caleb
 - C. Elijah and Elisha
 - D. Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 3:2)
 - E. Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1)
 - F. Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. 8:9)
- VIII. Nehemiah pinpointed the starting point of Daniel's prophecy concerning the 70 weeks.
 - A. The prophecy—"From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25)
 - B. The beginning—"Let . . . me . . . come into Judah . . . to make beams for the gates . . . and for the wall of the city . . . and the king granted me" (Neh. 2:7-8).
- IX. The book of Nehemiah also includes the last of three great prayers of confession by a man of God concerning the sins of Israel.
 - A. Daniel's prayer (Dan. 9:3-19)
 - B. Ezra's prayer (Ezra 9:5-15)
 - C. Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. 1:4-11)
- X. He provided for us the only listing of the names of the Jerusalem gates in the Bible (Neh. 3).

STATISTICS

Father: Hachaliah (Neh. 1:1)

Brothers: Hanani (Neh. 1:2)

First mention: Nehemiah 1:1

Final mention: Nehemiah 12:47

Meaning of his name: "Jehovah is great"

Frequency of his name: Referred to five times

Biblical books mentioning him: One book (Nehemiah)

Occupation: Political leader, wall builder (Neh. 2)

Place of birth: Persia

Place of death: Jerusalem

Important fact about his life: He led the final Jewish return from Persia to Jerusalem and rebuilt the wall around the city (Neh. 7:1)