



Wednesday Bible Education  
*Biblical Theology*  
Lesson 17: Nehemiah

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## REVIEW

*Questions from last week's lesson:*

1. What is in the book of Ezra?
2. How does Ezra help us today?

*Answers:*

1. Ezra has the account of the exiles return to Jerusalem from Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple, opposition to rebuilding the temple, including letters from Tattenai and Darius about the Jews' authority to rebuild the temple.

**Book Summary:** Ezra demonstrates that God can bring life from death as descendants of Jacob return to Jerusalem and re-establish worship there, like a down payment for God's promises.

2. Understanding Ezra should help us understand that God is wise (Ezra 7:25), good (Ezra 8:8), powerful (Ezra 8:22), gracious, kind, merciful, and righteous (Ezra 9:8-9, 13, 15).

Understanding Ezra in light of the Old Testament history should give us strong confidence in God's sovereignty.

Understanding Ezra helps us see the centrality of God's word and prayer, both in our lives and in the worship of God.

## INTRODUCTION

**W**hat is in the book of Nehemiah? Nehemiah recounts the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and records the opposition to that work.

### **Book Summary**

Nehemiah is about God's faithfulness to his promises. Just as he brought Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land, he also scattered them off the land for their disobedience and has brought a remnant back.

**Lesson Objective**

This lesson covers the book of Nehemiah. The lesson considers the structure and content of the book, along with major themes and practical applications to modern readers. We will consider what Nehemiah reveals about Christ and his kingdom as it fits into the Bible's main story.

**OBSERVATION**

Nehemiah is the eleventh book of history in the Old Testament. Nehemiah was together with Ezra as one book in the Tanak. Nehemiah is one of six Old Testament books written after the end of the Babylonian captivity, including three historical books and three prophet books: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi respectively.

Nehemiah is primarily historical narrative centering around the third wave of Jews returning to Jerusalem under Nehemiah around 445 BC. The events of the book take place about 1,000 years after Israel had entered the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Nehemiah has the last years of history recorded in the Old Testament. The book ends around 440 BC, which is about 400 years before Jesus was born. The book covers about 20 years of history.

Nehemiah contains lists, letters, and official decrees, like the book of Ezra. It contains accounts of the work in Jerusalem that may have been official reports. Nehemiah is a bit more personal than Ezra, as the book looks more closely at the life of Nehemiah than the book of Ezra looks at the life of Ezra. Nehemiah was a government official who was a governor and administrator in Jerusalem. The book focuses on Nehemiah's leadership in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in order to secure the city.

The book opens with Nehemiah in the palace at Shushan, serving as a cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes. He receives a report on the condition of Jerusalem. It had been a little over 90 years since the first return under Cyrus' decree, which return was led by Zerubbabel. Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem after Artaxerxes issues a decree. If we mark this as the beginning of Daniel's 69 weeks, we can calculate to the time of the death of the Messiah.

Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah begins work on the wall. He immediately faces opposition to the work. The wall is completed in about the middle of the book. The work took about two months time, 52 days (6:15).

Chapter 7 gives a list of the returned exiles. Chapter 8 begins with Ezra reading the law, followed by the Feast of Tabernacles and the daily reading of the law. Chapter 9 features a fast and national confession of sin. The people make a covenant to keep God's law. Chapter 10 lists the signers of the covenant, recounts the dedication of the wall, and the organization of the people. Nehemiah ends his governorship and returns to Persia. Bigvai serves as governor and Malachi prophesies in Jerusalem. Later Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and serves as governor a second time. He works to clean up Jerusalem and the book ends by detailing

his efforts.

***A brief outline of Ezra:***

1. Chapters 1-6 Rebuilding the Walls
2. Chapters 7-13 Reviving Worship and Ordering the Community

## INTERPRETATION

What does Ezra teach?

### ***God's Word***

Nehemiah is filled with references to God's word. Going to the word of God to understand it and keep it emerges as a theme in the book (8:1, 8, 13; 9:3; 10:29, 34, 36; 13:1). Nehemiah was oft referenced revival at the water gate in chapter 8, which includes the reading and exposition of the law.

### ***Prayer***

Nehemiah features numerous prayers. The book opens with prayer in Shushan (1:4) and ends with prayer in Jerusalem (13:31). The book has prayers in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 13. Nehemiah prays for the kingdom to come (1:3-11). He prays that God would judge their enemies and deliver his people from them (3:36-37; 4:4-5). He prays for God to be glorified in being just with Sanballat and Tobiah (3:37; 4:5; 6:14; 13:29). He cleanses the temple in order for God's name to be hallowed there (13:7-9). Nehemiah also prays for God to remember him and show mercy (5:19; 13:14, 22, 31).

### ***Obedience***

It's not surprising to find a theme of obedience since the book continually references God's word. Nehemiah is presented as obedient to God. He confesses his motivation to rebuild the wall (7:5).

### ***Opposition***

Nehemiah features well known opposition to the Lord's work. The book recounts seven attempts to stop the work to rebuild the wall. Opposition comes in the form of mocking by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (2:19), another round of mocking by Sanballat and Tobiah (4:1-3), an attack threatened (4:7-23), Sanballat and Geshem try to lure Nehemiah outside the city (6:1-4), Sanballat threatens Nehemiah with a false charge (6:5-9), the hiring of false prophets (6:10-14), and finally spies in Jerusalem send letters to Tobiah and he sends letters to Nehemiah to frighten him (6:17-19).

Nehemiah reveals the reality of opposition. The enemies lied, cheated, threatened and would do whatever they could to stop the work, However, the work was completed. Overcoming opposition in Nehemiah pictures the future kingdom and victory coming through triumph over enemies.

### ***The Messiah and His Kingdom***

Nehemiah contributes to the expectation of the Messiah and his kingdom. Nehemiah prays for the kingdom to come (1:5-11), echoing the word of promise in Deuteronomy 30:2-3. Obviously, the kingdom has not come to Israel, though they had returned to Jerusalem nearly a century before. During that time, the returned failed to obey God's word and keep his covenant. Chapter 9 makes plain the kingdom has not come and is still to be looked for in the future. This return to Jerusalem is only a foretaste and foreshadow of the restoration of Israel to come in the future at the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish his kingdom.

### **APPLICATION**

How does Nehemiah help us as modern readers?

Understanding Nehemiah will help us see that prayer is an appropriate response to problems we face, sins we have committed, and the desires for God's glory we have.

Understanding Nehemiah helps us understand opposition we will certainly face in the pursuit of God's glory in our lives.

Understanding Nehemiah helps us see the sovereignty of God in action, working both in the lives of those obeying him and the lives of those opposing him.

Understanding Nehemiah helps us understand God is the finisher of his work regardless of what means he employs.

Understanding Nehemiah helps us see God's glory (9:5), goodness (1:10; 2:8, 18; 9:35), kindness (9:17), longsuffering (9:30), mercy (9:17, 27), power (1:10), righteousness (9:8), and wisdom (9:10) in keeping his promises.

Understanding Nehemiah helps us understand that sin must be confronted with God's word and repentance sought.

### **CONCLUSION**

Nehemiah, like Ezra, shows the unrealized hope of the Jews in returning to Jerusalem. For nearly a century, they lived in Jerusalem but still didn't obey God's word or keep his covenant. It caps off the story of the return to Jerusalem with a third great leader who still failed to achieve a restoration of Israel and Judah. Nehemiah highlights the continued need for the Holy One of Israel, the Messiah, to come and redeem and restore Israel to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology going book by book through the entire Bible. Each lesson typically covers one book of the Bible, though occasionally covers more than one book when the books are short. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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