

Nehemiah

The author of this book was no doubt Nehemiah himself. There are portions of the book written in the first person, but there are also portions of it in which Nehemiah is spoken of in the third person. It is supposed that these portions may have been written by Ezra; of this, however, there is no distinct evidence. These portions had their place assigned them in the book, it is believed, by Nehemiah, who was the responsible author of the whole book.

The book, which may historically be regarded as a continuation of the book of Ezra, consists of four parts. (1) An account of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and of the register Nehemiah had found of those who had returned from Babylon. (2) An account of the state of religion among the Jews during this time. (3) Increase of the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the census of the adult male population, and names of the chiefs, together with lists of priests and Levites. (4) Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the arrangement of the temple officers, and the reforms carried out by Nehemiah. This book closes the history of the Old Testament. Malachi the prophet was contemporary with Nehemiah.

Author: The Book of Nehemiah does not specifically name its author. It is highly likely that either Nehemiah or Ezra was the author.

Date of Writing: The Book of Nehemiah was likely written between 445 and 420 BC when Nehemiah had returned the second time to Jerusalem after his visit to Persia.

Purpose of Writing: Nehemiah was a Hebrew in Persia when the word reached him that the Temple was being reconstructed. He grew anxious knowing there was no wall to protect the city. Nehemiah invited God to use him to save the city. God answered his prayer by softening the heart of the Persian king. Artaxerxes gave not only his blessing, but also supplies to be used in the project. Through opposition and accusations the wall was built and the enemy silenced. The people rejoiced and Nehemiah went back to Persia. After 12 years he returned to find the walls strong but the people weak. He set about the task of teaching the people morality and he didn't mince words. "I argued with those people, put curses on them, hit some of them and pulled out their hair" (13:25).

Key Verses: Nehemiah 1:3, "They said to me, "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."

Nehemiah 1:11, "O 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. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man."

Nehemiah 6:15-16, "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God."

Brief Summary: Nehemiah is given permission by the king of Persia to return to Jerusalem, where he rebuilds the walls of the city and is made governor. The people, inspired by Nehemiah, give tithes of much money, supplies and manpower to complete the wall in a remarkable 52 days, despite much opposition. This united effort is short-lived, however, because Jerusalem falls back into apostasy when Nehemiah leaves for a while. But he then returns to re-establish true worship through prayer and by encouraging the people to revival by reading and adhering the Word of God.

About city walls

In ancient times, most cities had city walls which were an important defence that surrounded the city. The walls would be strong and high, often several metres thick, making the city like a large castle.

The top of the wall would be flat so the city's guards could walk on top. From there, they could watch for any criminals who were inside the walls as well as see if an enemy army approached the city.

There would be some towers along the wall which were tall, strong buildings that the guards could use in times of attack. In addition, there were large gates. During the day, these gates were open so that traders and travellers could enter the city. But by night, the guards closed the gates so nobody could enter, thus keeping the city safe.

Because the wall was so strong, people would use it for other purposes too. For example, people might build their houses against it. In some cities, these houses actually became part of the city wall.