

Summary of Readings

Day One: Nehemiah 1:1-2:10

Nehemiah is introduced as the author of this book. Upon his brother's return from Jerusalem, Nehemiah asks about the "remnant" that survived the Exile and Jerusalem. Nehemiah's brother reports that there is trouble for the remnant and for Jerusalem because of the absence of the walls that used to surround the city and provide protection. Nehemiah weeps at this revelation and offers a prayer to God in which he confesses Israel's sin and asks that God to grant him success in the request he is going to make.

When Nehemiah goes to deliver the wine to the King [as the King's cupbearer] the King is surprised by Nehemiah's sadness and inquires as to the reason for his sadness. Nehemiah reports to the King the plight of Jerusalem. When the King asks for Nehemiah's request, Nehemiah asks the King to allow him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. The King asks for and receives a timetable for Nehemiah's work and sends him with letters to the local governors to help with protection and supplies for the work of rebuilding the city walls.

Day Two: Nehemiah 2:11-3:32

After three days stay in Jerusalem, Nehemiah sneaks out at night to survey what is left of the city walls. During this excursion, Nehemiah rallies the local officials who had grown complacent with the insecurity that the destroyed walls created. When the local Ammonite officials hear of Nehemiah's plan, they mock them and grow concerned about a possible rebellion.

Chapter three recounts who worked on which sections of the wall as the rebuilding process begins. This chapter of the Bible is an important component of modern day understanding of the topography and layout of Ancient Jerusalem.

Day Three: Nehemiah 4

Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, grows angry because of the work that the Jews are doing to restore the walls of Jerusalem. With others, Sanballat conspires to stir up trouble against the project. The news of Sanballat's anger and threats reaches the workers and leads to a diminished desire to complete the work. Nehemiah encourages the people by dividing his work force during each shift into workers and soldiers who stand guard. Even workers carried their swords and spears with them while they continued to build. Nehemiah further instructs the people to listen for the trumpet which will sound in the instance of an attack since the workers are spread out. All the men of Jerusalem work from first light until, "the stars came out," in order to complete the work and carried their swords and spears with them at all times.

Day Four: Nehemiah 5

The poor within Jerusalem cry out against their fellow Jews who are "enslaving" the poor. Nehemiah becomes angry at these economic circumstances. Nehemiah accuses the "nobles and officials" of "exacting usury" or interest from the poor and benefiting personally from their economic plight. Nehemiah identifies this practice as a violation of Torah and orders the collecting of interest on debts to stop. Further, he instructs them to give back fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses to the poor as well as the interest that has been collected. The nobles and other officials comply with Nehemiah's demands. Chapter five ends with Nehemiah's words regarding his practices while serving for twelve years as governor in the region. During this time, Nehemiah

contests that he nor his officials ate the food allotted to the governor in order to reduce the burden on the people of the region.

Day Five: Nehemiah 6:1-7:3

When work on the wall nears its completion, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem try to lure Nehemiah away for a meeting but Nehemiah refuses in writing four times. The fifth time, Sanballat sends an unsealed letter accusing Nehemiah of plotting a rebellion and trying to become King of Judah. Nehemiah denies the charge and prays for God to strengthen the hands of the workers amidst the swirling rumors. Fifty two days into the project, the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem is completed. Trouble continues to swirl between Nehemiah and Tobiah.

Nehemiah appoints gatekeepers, guards and his brother, Hanani, to protect Jerusalem.

Day Six: Nehemiah 7:73-8:18

After the Israelites had settled into their own towns, they gather for Ezra's reading from the book of Moses. Ezra reads from daybreak to midday. At the conclusion of this reading, Nehemiah instructs tells the people not to grieve for this is a sacred day. He further commands them to, "enjoy choice food and sweet drinks," because they have heard and understood the word of the Lord on this day. The following day, the Priests, Levites and heads of the families gather again for Ezra's reading. During this session, they discover the Feast of Booths. The leaders are sent out to prepare for the festival. Their "joy was very great."

Day Seven: Nehemiah 9:1-37; 10:28-39

Later that month, after the celebration of the Feast of booths, the Israelites gather for confession. During this corporate time of prayer and worship, the history of God's redeeming of Israel is recounted before they ask God to redeem them again from the slavery they find themselves in. The Israelites covenant together to keep the Law of Moses by refraining from foreign marriage, not buying foreign goods on the Sabbath, observing a seventh year Sabbath for the land, offering gifts and other contribution throughout the year for the work of the Temple, presenting the firstborn of sons and animals for the work of the Temple, and the first fruits of their harvest as well. The chapter ends with the words, "we will not neglect the house of our God."

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalms 126

The Vision is Cast

Nehemiah 1:5-11 : Nehemiah's Prayer

Nehemiah 2:2-6

Nehemiah 2:17-18

The Opposition Grows

Nehemiah 4:1-12

Nehemiah 5:6-12 : A bit of an aside...

"Let it not be permitted to end upon usury to any Hebrew either meat or drink; for it is not just to draw a revenue from the misfortunes of a fellow countryman. Rather, in consoling him in his distress, you should reckon as gain the gratitude of such persons and the recompense that God has in store for an act of generosity."

Josephus, Antiquities

Sanballat throws the Hail Mary

Nehemiah 6:6-7

Nehemiah 6:8

The wall is completed, the revival begins...

Heart Check

- Has God softened your heart for a particular purpose/initiative in the world?
What have you done to respond to that experience?
- Is that a particular time in your life where you can remember acting in a courageous way because of what God has done in your life? What was that like? How did that happen?
- How do you handle negativity in your life?
- How do you manage conflict? What might Nehemiah's response teach you about future conflict?
- How do you deal with rumor or falsehoods?
- What partnerships do you currently have in your life that provide "security" for the future?
- What distractions are you allowing to receive too much time, energy and resources?
- In what ways do you need to "get off the mat?"