

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: NEHEMIAH

[Neh 8:9-12](#)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. TITLE

1. NAME—‘NEHEMIAH’

- a. Meaning = “Comfort of Jehovah”
- b. Name given in the first verse—*The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.*

2. HEBREW BIBLE

- a. Ezra and Nehemiah—were one book
- b. Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah—were one continuous story
- c. Ezra-Nehemiah *precedes* Chronicles

3. SEPTUAGINT

- a. Ezra-Nehemiah—were called *Esdras Dueteron*—‘Second Esdras’
- b. ‘First Esdras’—was the apocryphal *Book of Esdras*

4. LATIN BIBLE

- a. Divided Ezra and Nehemiah
- b. Nehemiah = ‘Second Ezra’
- c. Ezra = *Liber Primus Esdrae*—‘First Ezra’

5. PROTESTANT BIBLE

- a. Maintained division of Latin Bible
- b. Renamed books—‘Ezra’ and ‘Nehemiah’

B. AUTHOR

1. AUTHORSHIP—NEHEMIAH

- Probably with Ezra’s help

2. SOME PORTIONS CLEARLY WRITTEN BY NEHEMIAH

- [1:1-7:5](#)
- [12:27-43](#)
- [13:4-31](#)

3. OTHER PORTIONS GIVE ACCOUNTS PROBABLY EDITED BY EZRA

- **7:6-12:26** [List in Neh 7:5-73—almost identical to list in Ezra 2:1-70]
- **12:44-13:3**

4. NEHEMIAH—THE PERSON

- a. Cup-bearer to Artaxerxes I (reigned 464-423 BC)
 - Possibly appointment influenced by Esther—Artaxerxes’s step-mother]
 - Tasted king’s wine to prevent him from being poisoned
 - Position of great responsibility and trust—advisor to the king
 - Possibly responsible for growth, production, supplying all food/drink at court
- b. Requested to return to Jerusalem—[**2:1-5**—to rebuild city walls
 - Might have been unsettling to king—to lose such a loyal servant
 - Dangerous—because 4 years earlier Magabyzus—a satrap—had rebelled
 - Request granted—[**2:6-8**—possibly for Nehemiah to bring stability to region
 - Left Persia for Jerusalem—20th year of Artaxerxes—**13:6**
- c. Governor of Jerusalem for 12 years (444-432 BC)
 - Returned to Persia in 32nd year of Artaxerxes (432 BC)
 - Returned to Jerusalem “after certain days”—**13:7**—maybe about 425 BC
- d. Contemporary of Ezra—**Neh 8:1-9** and **12:36**

C. BACKGROUND—SCOPE—SETTING

1. BACKGROUND—BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- a. 70-year Babylonian Captivity—**II Chr 36:20-21**
- b. Calculating the 70 years—two possibilities
 1. **Political** captivity—from defeat of Jerusalem **605**—to return of first Remnant—**536**
 2. **Religious** captivity—from destruction of Temple **587**—to rebuilding **516**

2. BACKGROUND—CYRUS’S DECREE—FOR EXILES TO RETURN—538 BC

3. HISTORICAL SCOPE—OF **EZRA** AND **NEHEMIAH**

- a. **Ezra**
 1. Begins **538 BC**—first return—under **Zerubbabel**—rebuilding Temple

[Interlude—*Book of Esther*—483-473 BC]

2. Ends **457 BC**—second return—under **Ezra**—restoration of people

[Followed by gap of 13 years]

b. **Nehemiah**

- **444-425 BC**—from Nehemiah’s first arrival—rebuilding Jerusalem wall—to resettlement of people and reforms with Ezra

c. **Malachi**—prophesied during Nehemiah’s era

4. **HISTORICAL SETTING—CHRONOLOGY**

- **607**—First Deportation
- **605**—Fall of Jerusalem
- **597**—Second Deportation
- **587/6**—Third—final—Deportation
- **538**—First Return—Zerubbabel—made governor of Israel
- **536**—beginning of Temple-building—foundation was laid
- **534**—Temple-building discontinued
- **520**—Temple-building resumed
- **520 and following**—ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- **515**—Temple completed
- **483-473**—Esther was queen—under Xerxes
- **458**—Second Return—Ezra—under Artaxerxes
- **444**—Third Return—Nehemiah—under Artaxerxes

D. COMPOSITION

1. **AUTHORSHIP—NEHEMIAH AND EZRA**

2. **DATE OF WRITING**

- No sooner than Nehemiah’s second trip to Jerusalem—about **432 BC** (?)

E. PURPOSES/THEMES

1. **RECOUNTS—REBUILDING CITY WALLS OF JERUSALEM (Chapters 1-7)**

2. **RETELLS STORY OF—SPIRITUAL RESTORATION OF JEWISH PEOPLE (Ch 8-13)**

3. **RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF CIVIL AUTHORITY**

4. **ORGANIZED RE-SETTLEMENT OF PEOPLE IN ISRAEL**

5. **GOD’S PROVIDENTIAL HAND IN REBUILDING AND RESETTLING**

- Nehemiah did in 52 days—what had not been done in 94 years since Zerubbabel returned

- God enabled Nehemiah—to overcome resistance on many fronts

6. CONTRAST—EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

- a. **Ezra**—religious restoration of Israel—Temple and personal reformation
- b. **Nehemiah**—political and geographical restoration of Israel—plus personal reformation

F. STORYLINE

1. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL—**Chapters 1-7**

- a. Previous history of the wall
 1. Destroyed in 586 BC by Babylonians
 2. Probably almost rebuilt after 464 BC—before second return under Ezra—**Ez 3:6-23**
 3. Subsequent opposition—led to second destruction
- b. Nehemiah prayed and obtained permission to return—**1:1-2:10**
- c. Nehemiah returned—surveyed work—challenged people to rebuild—**2:11-20**
 1. Return was—13 years after Ezra’s return—94 years after Zerubbabel
 2. Opposition raised—**2:19**
 - **Sanballat**—Governor of Samaria—first of 4 generations of governors
 - **Tobiah**—Governor of Amman
 - **Gesham**—Arabian Governor of Kedar
- d. Organization for rebuilding—with names of supervisors by section—**Chapter 3**
- e. Overcoming Ongoing opposition—**4:1-6:14**
- f. Completion of the wall—**6:15-19**
- g. Organization of Jerusalem—**7:1-4**
- h. Re-cap of first census under Zerubbabel—**7:5-73**

2. RESTORATION OF THE PEOPLE—**Chapters 8-13**

- a. **Ezra’s Renewal of the Covenant**—**Chapters 8-10**
 1. Reading of the Law—and Remorse of the People—**8:1-8**
 2. Nehemiah and Ezra encourage the people—**8:9-12**
 3. Restoration of Feast of Booths—**8:13-18**
 4. Reaffirmation of the Covenant—**Chapters 9-10**

b. People Resettled and Reformed—Chapters 11-13

1. Population resettled—**Chapter 11**
2. Registration of Priests and Levites—**12:1-26**
3. Dedication of Jerusalem wall—**12:27-47**

[Note: Nehemiah returned to Persia in 432—then returned prior to **13:7**]

4. Restoration of the People—Reforms with Ezra—**Chapter 13**

II. BIBLICAL TEXT—Neh 8:1-12

Reading of the Law

1 *And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. 8 They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.*

This Day is Holy

9 *Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law. 10 Then he said to them, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.” 12 All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.*

III. EXPOSITION

A. BACKGROUND

1. THEY HAD FINISHED THE WALL
2. THEY GATHERED ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH

3. THEY MOURNED WHEN THEY LISTENED TO THE LAW—READ BY EZRA

4. EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND THE LEVITES SAID—DO NOT MOURN

5. REASONS NOT TO MOURN

- a. The people had repented
- b. This day is holy to the Lord
- c. The joy of the Lord is your strength

B. THE PEOPLE HAD REPENTED

1. SIMILAR TO THE GREAT REFORM UNDER JOSIAH—**II Kgs 22**

2. THIS SHOULD BE AN OCCASION FOR JOY—when people confess their sin and mourn

3. THEY HAD AVERTED FUTURE DISASTER—by turning back to the Lord

4. DO NOT DWELL ON PAST SIN—but look to the future!

5. THEY POSSESSED THE RE-DISCOVERED LAW—to guide them into the future

C. THIS DAY IS HOLY TO THE LORD

1. FIRST DAY OF THE 7th LITURGICAL MONTH—TISHRI [SEP/OCT]—WAS HOLY

2. THE FEAST OF TRUMPETS

Lev 23:23-25—*Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.’”*

- a. Explained in more detail—**Nu 29:1-6**
- b. First day of the civil year—**Rosh Hashana**—Jewish New Year’s Day
- c. Traditional celebrations
 - Day celebrating creation of Adam and Eve
 - Day celebrating God as King of the Universe
 - Preceded by 29 days of 90 horn blasts—with one long blast at the end
- d. Opened month of high holy days
 - Yom Kippur—Day of Atonement—10 Tishri—[and forgiveness of sin!]
 - Feast of Tabernacles—15 Tishri—God’s provision—and in-gathering

3. Take joy—be encouraged by celebrating what God has done—in gathered worship

D. THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

1. THE JOY OF THE LORD'S PROVISION

a. In what God had **recently done**

1. Returning the Remnant to Jerusalem
2. Rebuilding the Temple
3. Rebuilding the wall
4. Re-discovering the Law

b. In what they were **about to celebrate**

1. The Feast of Tabernacles—God's deliverance and provision in the wilderness
2. The Day of Atonement—God's provision of forgiveness—[which would be renewed]

c. **The joy of rehearsing God's provision to us!**

2. THE JOY OF THE LORD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

a. Repentance led to further confession—and renewal of the covenant—**Chapters 9-10**

b. Reminder of God's faithfulness—fulfilling His promise to **Abraham**

9:8—*You found his heart faithful before You, And made a covenant with him To give him the land of the Canaanite, Of the Hittite and the Amorite, Of the Perizzite, the Jebusite and the Girgashite— To give it to his descendants. And You have fulfilled Your promise, For You are righteous.*

c. They renewed their trust in God—who keeps His covenant

Especially in their time of great difficulty

9:32—*Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and living-kindness—do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You.*

9:37-38—*So we are in great distress. Now because of all this, we are making an agreement in writing, and on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.*

d. **Our joy is in the Lord's strength—His promise—His faithfulness—not in our circumstances!!!**