

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 5 Lecture

Nehemiah 1-2

- What are the themes of Nehemiah?
 - Rebuilding, Renewal, Recommitment
 - Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's city walls and gates.
 - Nehemiah rebuilt the leadership and organization of Judah.
 - Nehemiah renewed the people's commitment to God, to his Law, and to his commandments.
 - The people of Judah recommitted themselves to God's covenant, to support the Temple, to keep the Sabbath, and to divorce their foreign wives.
 - Prayer
 - Nehemiah modeled prayer for the community.
 - He was a devout prayer warrior and sought God's guidance before making decisions or taking actions.
 - Opposition
 - Much like Ezra, Nehemiah faced opposition to his efforts. He prevailed with God's sustaining help.
- Nehemiah 1 opens with the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes residing in the citadel of Susa.
 - Susa is one of the oldest cities in the ancient Near East. Carbon-14 dating of artifacts from its ruins indicate that the city may have been founded as early as 4395 BC.
 - During the Sumerian period, control of Susa vacillated among the Sumerians, the Elamites, and the Akkadians.
 - Susa became part of the Persian Empire when Cyrus the Great conquered Elam in 539 BC.

- Susa, the winter capital, became one of the 4 capitals of Persia, along with Babylon, Pasargadae, and Persepolis. Darius was the first king of Persia to make Susa a capital city.
- Today, Susa's archaeological ruins are in western Iran and houses the tomb of the prophet Daniel.
- Much as we saw in Daniel and Ezra, in Nehemiah 1-2 we see God moving in the heart and mind of another king in support of God's people.
 - This time it is Artaxerxes, whose heart is moved to permit his cupbearer to go to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls.
 - The fact that it was Artaxerxes who had stopped the building of the wall in the first place, as noted in Ezra 4:21, makes Artaxerxes' acquiescence to Nehemiah's request even more astounding.
 - Proverbs 21:1 says, "In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him."
 - In addition to his permission, the king grants Nehemiah's requests for letters of safe-conduct and for building timbers for the gates of the citadel, for the city wall, and for Nehemiah's residence.
 - Without a request from Nehemiah, the king also sent an army guard to protect Nehemiah on his route.
 - Clearly, Nehemiah was viewed fondly by the king.
- There are other situations which may have also influenced Artaxerxes' decision to allow Judah to rebuild Jerusalem's city walls.
 - Artaxerxes had just put down a 6-year Egyptian rebellion (460-455 BC) which was complicated by Athenian support for Egypt's cause.
 - In 448 BC, Megabyzus, the satrap of Trans-Euphrates, rebelled against Persia. He was later reconciled to the king.
 - Having Judah, which owed much to Persia now, as a stable buffer state in the Trans-Euphrates was definitely in Artaxerxes' best interest.

- There is one interesting thing to point out from Nehemiah 2:3: “Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”
 - Notice that Nehemiah did not mention his Jewish heritage or Jerusalem by name, although his heritage could not have been a secret from the king.
 - He appeals to the king based on a respect for ancestral tombs, which was common throughout the Ancient Near East.
- When Nehemiah presented his safe conduct letters to the sub-governors of the Trans-Euphrates, accompanied by an armed guard, the sub-governors surely asked, “Why are you here?”
 - Nehemiah may have dissembled with an answer like, “I’m here to restore the tombs of my ancestors.” He was not ready to lay his plans for rebuilding the wall before anyone, least of all Judah’s enemies.
 - Just as we saw in Ezra, Judah’s neighbors had no interest in Jerusalem being rebuilt. When they saw that Nehemiah was leading the effort to rebuild the wall, they did not like it.
 - Nehemiah encounters 3 named sub-governors: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem.
 - Sanballat, the Horonite of Moab, was the sub-governor of Samaria, the province north of Judah.
 - Tobiah the Ammonite may have been the sub-governor of Ammon.
 - Geshem was an important Arabic official of Dedan, an oasis and city-state in northwestern Arabia, just south of Judah. It is now part of Saudi Arabia.
- After resting for 3 days, Nehemiah makes a night inspection of Jerusalem’s walls with a few trusted men. Because of a blockage (probably rubble) at the Pool of Siloam (the King’s Pool), he could not complete a full circuit of the wall via that route. He had to retreat the way he had come and approach the Pool of Siloam from the other direction.

- Most of the walls had been built with limestone, which burns easily. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar had torn down Jerusalem's walls and set fire to the city. Sanballat, the Moabite sub-governor of Samaria, made this comment about the walls in Nehemiah 4:2e:
 - Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble —burned as they are?

- Here is a map showing Jerusalem's walls in the time of Nehemiah and a photo of a portion of the walls he built that have been excavated.

Ezra Nehemiah Lesson 5

Nehemiah 1-2

We have sinned, even as our ancestors did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly.
Psalms 106:6

1. Read Nehemiah 1:1-11.
 - a. What time of year does the month of Kislev fall?
November or December
 - b. Looking forward to Nehemiah 2:1, in conjunction with Nehemiah 1:1, who was ruling Persia and how long had he been king? Note: the year is approximately 445 BC.
Artaxerxes was ruling and he had been ruling 20/21 years.
 - c. Reviewing Lesson 4 Question 1, who else would have been in Judah at this time?
Ezra, in addition to Levites, priests, musicians, gatekeepers, other Jews
 - d. Where was Nehemiah living at this time?
The citadel of Susa
 - e. What does Nehemiah learn about Judah?
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 1:3
 - f. What was Nehemiah’s reaction?
When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Nehemiah 1:4
 - g. How does Nehemiah begin his prayer?
LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁶ let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. Nehemiah 1:5-6
 - h. What does Nehemiah confess?
I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. ⁷ We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Nehemiah 1:6-7

- i. What does Nehemiah remind God?
Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations,⁹ but **if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.**’¹⁰ **“They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.**
Nehemiah 1:8-10
- j. What 2 things does Nehemiah ask of God in Nehemiah 1:11?
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 favor in the presence of this man.
Nehemiah 1:11
- k. What was Nehemiah’s job and what was the importance of this position?
- Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king. Before serving the king wine, the cupbearer tasted it to make sure it wasn’t poisoned.
 - The cupbearer had close and constant access to the king.

2. Read Nehemiah 2:1-10.

- a. When does Nehemiah’s interaction with the king take place?
In the month of Nisan in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes (Note: Nisan is in the spring)
- b. What did the king say to Nehemiah?
Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart. Nehemiah 2:2
- c. What is Nehemiah’s response?
May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?
Nehemiah 2:3
- d. What does the king ask Nehemiah in Nehemiah 2:4?
What is it you want? Nehemiah 2:4
- e. What did Nehemiah ask of the king in verse 5?
Then I prayed to the God of heaven,⁵ and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it. Nehemiah 2:4-5

- f. What does verse 6 tell you about the king's relationship to Nehemiah and his expectation?
- Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. Nehemiah 2:6
 - The king's response indicates he values Nehemiah and is anxious for him to return to Persia after his mission to Judah.
- g. What additional requests did Nehemiah make of the king?
- I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?⁸ And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" Nehemiah 2:7-8
- h. What else did the king do for Nehemiah and why?
- And **because the gracious hand of my God was on me**, the king granted my requests.⁹ So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. **The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.** Nehemiah 2:8-9
- i. When Nehemiah arrived in Judah, what was the reaction of 2 non-Jews? (Note: the Horonites were from Moab.)
- When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites. Nehemiah 2:10
3. Read Nehemiah 2:11-16. What did Nehemiah do upon arriving in Jerusalem and why? Nehemiah rested for 3 days. Then, he went out on horseback at night with a few trusted men to inspect the walls and gates of Jerusalem.
4. Read Nehemiah 2:17-20.
- a. What did Nehemiah say to the rulers of Judah?
- Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."¹⁸ I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. Nehemiah 2:17-18

- b. Why did he want to rebuild Jerusalem's walls? (See Ezekiel 5:14.)
- I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. Ezekiel 5:14
 - So that Judah would no longer be a disgrace to the surrounding nations
- c. What other reason can you think of for rebuilding the walls?
To protect the city of Jerusalem from its neighbors and invading armies
- d. What was the response from the rulers?
They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. Nehemiah 2:18
- e. What did some of the non-Jews say when the work to rebuild the walls began?
But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" they asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?" Nehemiah 2:19
- f. How does Ezra 4:13 add context to the non-Jews' words in Nehemiah 2:19?
- Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and eventually the royal revenues will suffer. Ezra 4:13
 - Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were implying that, by rebuilding the city and its walls, that Judah would no longer pay taxes to the Persians.
- g. What does Nehemiah say in response to the accusations of the non-Jews?
I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." Nehemiah 2:20
- h. Can you think of other reasons why the non-Jews wouldn't want Jerusalem's walls rebuilt?
- Walls and gates could restrict their free access to and from Jerusalem.
 - Walls and gates could restrict illegal activities they might be conducting.
 - They feared a strong Jerusalem and a strong Judah.

- i. What do you think Nehemiah meant by “you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it?” (For context, see Deuteronomy 23:3-4.
- No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. ⁴ For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. Deuteronomy 23:3-4
 - Sanballat was from Moab and Tobiah was from Ammon.

Nehemiah 1 - 2



Greek Icon of Nehemiah; copyright:
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Themes of Nehemiah

- Rebuilding, Renewal, Recommitment
 - Nehemiah Rebuilt Jerusalem's City Walls and Gates
 - Nehemiah Rebuild the Leadership and Organization of Judah
 - Nehemiah Renewed the People's Commitment to God, to His Law, and to His Commandments
 - The People Recommitted Themselves to God's Covenant, to Support the Temple, to Keep the Sabbath, and to Divorce Their Foreign Wives

Themes of Nehemiah

- Prayer
 - Nehemiah Modeled Prayer for the Community
 - He Was a Devout Prayer Warrior
 - He Sought God's Guidance Before Making Decisions or Taking Actions
- Opposition
 - Like Ezra, Nehemiah Faced Opposition to His Efforts
 - He Prevailed With God's Sustaining Help

Susa

- Nehemiah 1 Opens with the Cupbearer to King Artaxerxes Residing in the Citadel of Susa
- One of the Oldest Cities in the Ancient Near East; Carbon-14 Dating Indicates the City May Have Been Founded as Early as 4395 BC
- During the Sumerian Period, Control of Susa Vacillated Among the Sumerians, the Elamites, and the Akkadians
- Susa Became Part of the Persian Empire When Cyrus the Great Conquered Elam in 539 BC
- Susa, the Winter Capital, Became 1 of the 4 Capitals of Persia, Along with Babylon, Pasargadae, and Persepolis; Darius Was the 1st Persian King to Make Susa a Capital City
- Susa's Ruins are in Western Iran Today

Persian Empire, 500 BC; copyright: Ways of the World, First Edition, 2009, Bedford/St. Martin's





Arial map of
Darius'
Palace in
Susa;
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2009



Archers' Frieze from Darius' Palace in Susa; copyright:
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Tomb of the
Prophet Daniel in
Susa; copyright:
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What Else Influenced Artaxerxes?

- He Had Just Put Down a 6-Year Egyptian Rebellion (460-455 BC) Which Was Complicated by Athenian Support for Egypt
- In 448 BC, Megabyzus, the Satrap of Trans-Euphrates Rebelled Against Persia. He Later Reconciled to the King.
- Having Judah, Which Owed Much to Persia Now, as a Stable Buffer State in the Trans-Euphrates Was Definitely in Artaxerxes' Best Interest

Nehemiah 2:3

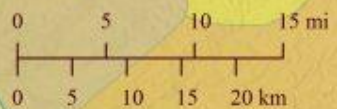
- Notice That Nehemiah Did Not Mention His Jewish Heritage or Jerusalem by Name
- His Heritage Could Not Have Been a Secret From the King
- He Appeals to the King Based on a Respect for Ancestral Tombs, Which Was Common Throughout the Ancient Near East

Nehemiah and the Sub-Governors

- Why Are you Here?
- Nehemiah Likely Dissembled With an Answer About Restoring the Tombs of His Ancestors
- He Was Not Ready to lay His Plans for Rebuilding the Wall Before Anyone, Least of All Judah's Enemies, Who Had No Interest in Jerusalem Being Rebuilt
- Sanballat, Sub-Governor of Samaria
- Tobiah, Sub-Governor of Ammon
- Geshem, an Important Arabic Official in of Dedan (South of Judah)



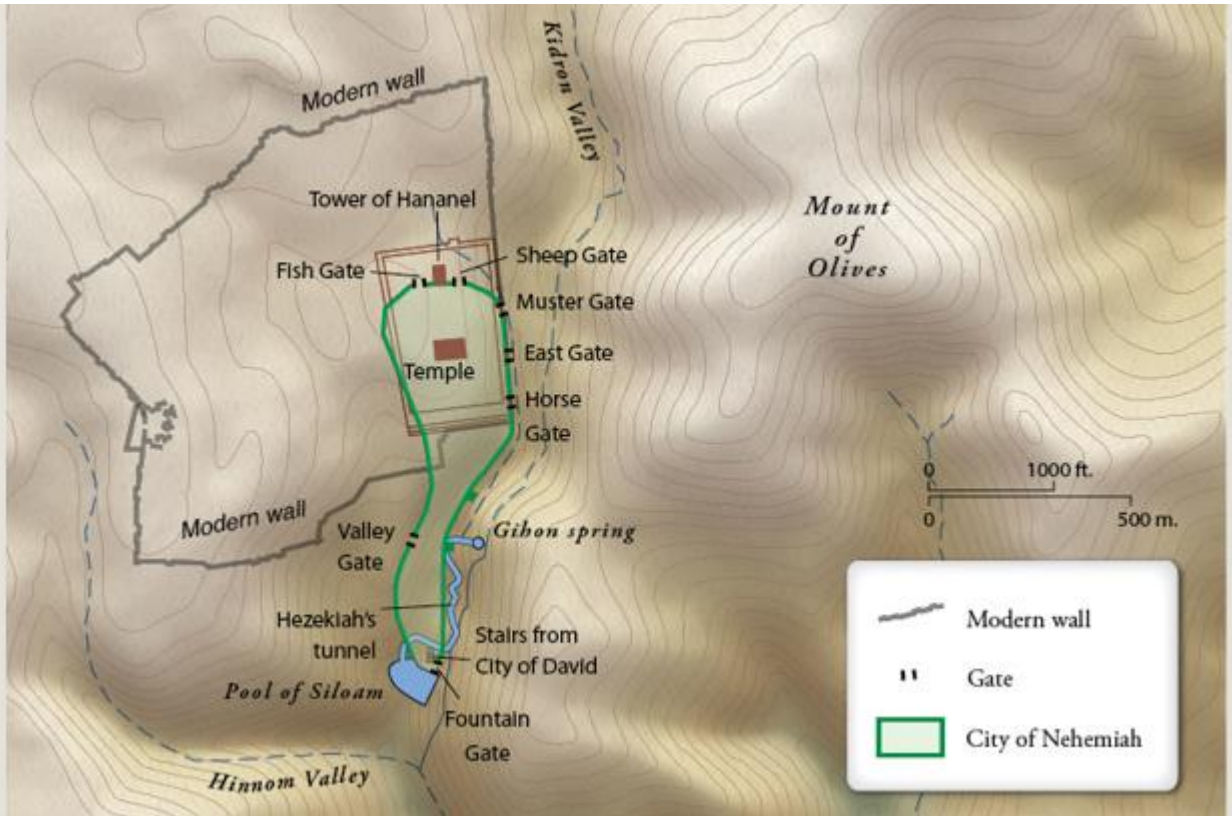
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Nehemiah Surveys the Walls

- He Inspects Them at Night With a Few Trusted Men
- Because of a Blockage at the Pool of Siloam (the King's Pool), He Could Not Complete a Full Circuit of the Wall Via That Route
- He Had to Retreat the Way He Had Come and Approach the Pool of Siloam From Another Direction

Diagram of Jerusalem City Walls at the Time of Nehemiah; copyright: NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, 2016, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan





North Tower and Jerusalem City Wall Built
by Nehemiah; copyright: biblicalarchaeology.org