

NEHEMIAH

(Book of Nehemiah)

Nehemiah, although not nearly as well-known as some other Old Testament heroes, was really a remarkable man of God. He had a very high position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, but his heart was very much concerned with the things going on in Jerusalem. He was deeply distressed about news of how the walls and gates of Jerusalem were all broken down. He was so sad that the king noticed his condition.

When the king learned the problem he graciously allowed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem, providing him with letters to officials in the area to provide the things which Nehemiah would need to complete his work. (About 18 years after Ezra left.)

When Nehemiah inspected the walls he realized that a lot of work was needed. He set about to organize the people to start re-building the walls. As mentioned earlier, there was a great deal of opposition from non-Jews in the area to the re-establishment of the Jewish community. When Nehemiah began the re-building there were 2 men, Tobiah and Sanballat who began a campaign of vigorous opposition. The struggles between Nehemiah and his enemies were very heated.

Eventually, the walls and gates were finished---thanks to very hard work and much unselfish sacrifice on the part of Nehemiah. (One needs to read the account in order to appreciate the faith and determination needed to complete this task.)

As mentioned earlier, there was a great deal of work to be done to get the people to live in harmony with God. Ezra had addressed the problem of marriages with pagan people. He had also seen to it that the people listened to a reading of the Law (of Moses)---which so many had either forgotten or never really knew.

More and more people returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. The temple ceremonies were restored with qualified priests and Levites.

Nehemiah returned to Babylon for a while, but, learning of more problems, he came back to Jerusalem. Tobiah had been given a room in the temple by the evil priest Eliashib. The Sabbath was being defiled. Tithes were not handled properly. Once more, Nehemiah addressed the problems forcefully. From the end of Nehemiah to the beginning of the New Testament was about 400 years.