

*#23 Nehemiah | July 28, 2018*

**Nehemiah's Historical Setting**

- Nehemiah lived in the period of the return of the exiles.
- In 538 BC, King Cyrus the Great of Persia issues a decree allowing the exiles to return.
  - Ezra 1:1-2 (almost identical to 2 Chronicles 36:22-23) the heart of Cyrus was stirred to allow the release of the Jews to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.
  - Isaiah the prophet had prophesied about Cyrus and his edict, by name, in Isaiah 44:28-45:6. This was 150 years before the events occurred.
  - Many believe that Darius and Cyrus are the same person, thus Cyrus is mentioned in Daniel 5:30-31, events which took place on October 12, 539 BC.
  - 49,897 exiles returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1).
  - The construction of the Temple began immediately, but completion was delayed until 515 BC (Ezra 5-6).
- A later Persian King named Xerxes took a queen named Esther around 479 BC. Xerxes son Artaxerxes (was Esther his mother?) became King in 464 BC.
  - In 458 BC a second wave of exiles returned (Ezra 7-8).
- In 444, a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes went to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. Those who went with him were part of the third wave of exiles.
- In 330 BC, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Kingdom.

**Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem**

- Nehemiah, upon hearing of the condition of Jerusalem, wept before God for its restoration (Neh. 1:1-11).
- Nehemiah travelled to Jerusalem, under the authority of the King, and secretly made plans to rebuild, then presented those plans to the people (Neh. 2:11-20).
- The people immediately began to rebuild the walls and gates of the city. The phrase "next to him" is used 15 times in Nehemiah 3, displaying the "shoulder to shoulder" cooperative work.

- The work was harassed but not stopped by those who despised the Jewish people:
  - Sanballat – Nehemiah 4:1-2
  - Tobiah – Nehemiah 4:3-5
  - The work continued because **the people had a mind to work** – Nehemiah 4:6. (They also understood the need to defend their work – Nehemiah 4:17).
- The walls were completely restored in a matter of 52 days – Nehemiah 6:15.
- The remainder of the book of Nehemiah (chapters 7-13) speak of the repopulation and re-establishment of provisions to protect and prosper the city and the surrounding area.
- By the end of the book of Nehemiah, the nation of Judah was living safely in the land, under its own governors (serving under the authority of Persia), and rebuilding Jewish life.

**Completing the Old Testament**

- Haggai and Zechariah prophesied under the days of Ezra to speed the completion of the Second Temple.
- Malachi prophesied shortly after the times of Nehemiah, and preached against the corruption of the priesthood.
- The Old Testament closes with Israel living in Judah under Persian rule. Between the Testaments –
  - The Persians succumbed to the Greeks.
  - The Hashmoneans, a line of Jewish priestly-kings, rebelled against the Greeks and provided about 100 years of independent rule.
  - The Romans took Judah from the Hashmoneans in 64BC.

**Things You May Not Know**

- The books of 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah were originally one book in the Hebrew Scriptures, written by Ezra. In the Septuagint, they were divided into four books. Today the *TaNaKh* (the Hebrew Bible) has them in two books, Chronicles and Ezra/Nehemiah, while the English Bible goes by the pattern of the Septuagint.
- The book of Nehemiah is one of the most inspiring books concerning the completion of projects using political skill and pragmatic effort. Sadly, however, most preaching from Nehemiah misses the miraculous work of God that was behind the completion of the walls of Jerusalem. While there are lessons to glean from Nehemiah (and all other historical Biblical books), the revelation of God's work to deliver the Messiah through the Jewish nation is the purpose of the account.