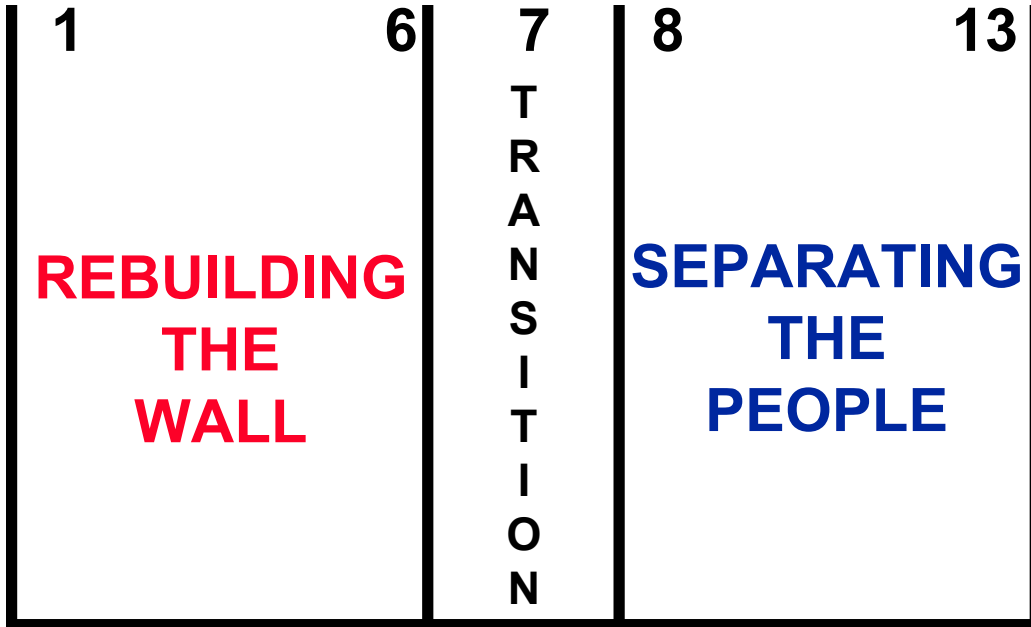


C. Baylis  
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3rd  
Return  
444 BC  
(2:3)

4th  
Return  
(13:6)

**NEHEMIAH**  
**REBUILDING THE CITY**

## NEHEMIAH

### Argument

#### The Book

This book was combined into one with Ezra in the earliest Hebrew manuscripts, as well as in the Septuagint. However they were two separate compositions. Nehemiah was written completely in Hebrew.

#### Date

The book of Ezra appears to have been written c. 440 B.C. while Nehemiah was written c. 430 B.C. Nehemiah most likely followed Ezra. They are found together in Neh. 8:9 at the reading of the Law and Neh. 12:26,36 at the dedication of the wall.

#### Historical Background

Nehemiah's return to the land of Palestine is the third wave of returns made from Babylon. Zerubbabel's was the first in 538, Ezra's was the second in 458, and now Nehemiah's is in 444 B.C. Zerubbabel had rebuilt the temple. Ezra had restored the proper Levitical worship. Nehemiah is now to return and rebuild the wall, since the people are being hampered by the natives who oppose the building and the return of the Jews.

The native oppression has been a big factor in the preceding book of Ezra. Zerubbabel had his building stopped as the pagan neighbors opposed it. Ezra had a major problem with the intermarrying of Jews with the pagan inhabitants. Now Nehemiah has the task of building a wall to keep God's chosen nation separated.

#### Author

As in the case of Ezra, Nehemiah is held to be the traditional author. This is primarily due to the fact that he uses the first person throughout (1-7; 12:31-13:31).

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer. He was given a particular length of time to return to Jerusalem and begin the work. He then returns (13:6) to lead the people in repentance.

#### Message

The separation of God's people unfolds in spite of the efforts of pagan Gentiles, first in overcoming physical opposition in the building of the wall, and then in a spiritual opposition in the separation of a people to himself.

#### Synthetic Outline

1. To trace the restoration of God's city through the rebuilding of the city walls to separate the people physically from the Gentile pagans. (1-6).
2. To trace the restoration of God's city through the rebuilding of the people to separate themselves from the Gentiles spiritually. (7-10).

### Commentary

*Basically the book is separated into two sections. The first is concerned with the building of the wall. The second is concerned with the moral state of the people in their worship and in their separation from the Gentiles. In short the book deals with separation and walls, both physically and spiritual walls. They had a holy God, who could not allow the mixing of the spiritually pure with the compromising filth.*

1. The restoration of God's city in the rebuilding of the walls is to separate the people physically from the Gentile pagans. (1-6).

*The first section is basically the story of Nehemiah's quest to rebuild the wall. It required a wall for the people to protect their separated worship, which was to come in chapters 7-10.*

*This section is composed of two parts, first the personal response of Nehemiah, in Babylon, to the news of Jerusalem, with its walls in shambles (1:1-11b). The second is the story of the wall building from its beginning to its completion (11:11b-6:19).*

- A. Nehemiah responds with covenant repentance when he hears about the devastation of Jerusalem's walls (1:1-11b).

*In the first section Nehemiah demonstrates his thorough participation in heart with God's purpose and God's people. Here was a man with a heart for God, who suffered at the disgrace that God's people had come to. He suffers at the report (1:1-4), he repents on behalf of the nation, and turns to God in prayer (1:5-11a).*

- B. The wall is completed though Gentile opposition oppresses Nehemiah (1:11b-6:19).

*In the second section, Nehemiah faces several areas of potential opposition. First, he faces a Gentile king (1:11b-2:8). Secondly, he faces a Gentile opposition to the rebuilding of the wall (2:9-4:23). He has to deal with the Jewish internal opposition (5:1-13). And finally he deals with Gentile attacks on him personally. All this opposition must be dealt with to accomplish the building of the wall.*

*The Gentile king is overcome personally by God (2:8b). He not only has placed Nehemiah in a position of respect, and has allowed the king to grant his request, but he has made the king to send guards with him, and to provide wood for the gates of the wall.*

*Secondly the Gentile oppression in Jerusalem had gotten so bad that the Gentiles desired to fight the Jews. Nehemiah again prayed and the Jews were to carry weapons while the wall building went forth.*

*The Jewish internal problems were basically due to the fact that the people were mortgaging their goods to other Jews who were loaning them money for usury. (cf. Zech. 11:5). Nehemiah asks that all goods be restored, and he is appointed governor over them.*

*Finally the Gentile oppression attacks Nehemiah personally. They attempt to scare Nehemiah. Sanballat tries to get Nehemiah to counsel together with him. Nehemiah refuses and prays. Shemiah tries to make Nehemiah hide to save his life. Nehemiah refuses to hide and prays. And finally, Tobiah tried to send letters to frighten Nehemiah, but the wall was completed.*

2. The restoration of God's city is traced through the rebuilding of the people to separate themselves from the Gentiles spiritually. (7-10).

- A. Having restored the wall, Nehemiah registers the people to begin the spiritual separation of the people (7:1-73a)

*Basically this section begins with a hinge chapter (7), when Nehemiah registers the people. This establishes the point at which Nehemiah, having now the physical separation, is going to proceed on with the work, the work of restoring these people and their hearts.*

- B. Nehemiah begins the process of the separation of the people under the Law (7:73b—13:31).

*The remainder of the book is the story of the restoration of the people to a worshipping community under God. Basically there is the covenanting of the people under the Law (7:73b-12:47). This section establishes the people under renewed covenant and renewed city. The final section demonstrates what happened to the people following this renewal (13:1-31).*

1. The People celebrate of the Feast of Booths (7:73—8:18).

*The covenanting section establishes the people as they celebrate the Feast of Booths (cf. Zech. 14:16) as people who desire to be under the Law (7:73-8:18).*

2. The People confess their sins and re-covenant with God (9:1—10:39).

*Confessing their sins as the Law required, the people covenanting with God according to the Law (9:1-10:39).*

3. The dedication of the wall takes place (11:1—12:47).

*Further there is in this section the restoring of Jerusalem as the city of God, as the dedication of the wall takes place (11:1-12:47).*

4. In Nehemiah's absence the people violate their covenant confessions and oaths demonstrating that they are no different than their previous generations (13:1-31).

*In the final section (13:1-31), the people are left to themselves as Nehemiah departs back to Persia and returns again. It is interesting to note that the people had covenanted to some of the following items; swearing a curse on those who intermarry with the foreign peoples, buy or sell on the Sabbath, do not keep the seventh year, or permit usury.*

*When Nehemiah returns he finds Tobiah, the opposer (6:15-19) living in the Temple. Nehemiah threw him out (13:8). The Levites and singers had not been supported (13:10-14). They were trading on the Sabbath (13:19-22) and they had married foreign women (13:23-29). Nehemiah in turn rebuked the people, and restored the erring. However, the book ends on the note of purification.*

*Thus the book ends, as Ezra with a note of expectation in one. The temple is ready, the walls are ready. The people have failed, but are repurified. What is to happen? The glory will return. Only 14 verses into the gospel of John he declares,*

"And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,  
and we beheld His glory,  
the glory as of the only begotten from the Father,  
full of grace and truth."

John 1:14