

LESSON TWELVE

NEHEMIAH

A. NEHEMIAH:

Nehemiah was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes who reigned as king of Persia during the period of 465-425 BC. Nehemiah was a trusted official. There is very little recorded about him apart from the book that bears his name. He was a man of prayer, courage and perseverance.

One of Nehemiah's brethren, Hanani, brought word of the ruined condition of Jerusalem. Undoubtedly Hanani believed that Nehemiah could help because authority was needed from the king to overcome the local opposition. Ezra had been in Jerusalem for thirteen years, but he was mainly occupied as a priest, teaching the people.

Nehemiah was overcome with grief and immediately went to pray (Nehemiah 1:4; 2:4). He spent four months in prayer before he made his request known to the king. He waited for the right opportunity to approach the king. Artaxerxes noticed the sadness of Nehemiah and asked the reason. Nehemiah told him of the condition at Jerusalem and asked permission to go to help. The king not only granted his request but also assigned soldiers to accompany Nehemiah.

B. THE THIRD RETURN:

With Nehemiah went a number of Jews returning to Jerusalem during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes reign (444 BC). There is no record just how many Jews accompanied Nehemiah. It would seem that there was a large number although not as large as the two former migrations.

C. BUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM:

Arriving in Jerusalem, he found the walls in rubble, completely dilapidated. He spent three nights inspecting the walls so that he might acquaint himself with the true condition. When he had all the facts, he met with the Jerusalem leaders and presented his plans. There was a good response. Workers were recruited from both inside and outside Jerusalem. They were assigned various sections of the wall on which to labor.

The work moved forward rapidly but severe opposition arose. The other nations who lived nearby, especially Samaria, benefited from Judah's weakness. The leaders of this opposition were Sanballet, Tobiah and Geshem. Nehemiah divided the workers into two groups. One group worked at building the walls; the other group bore arms. Each night a heavy guard was posted. The wall was completed in 52 days and Jerusalem was once again a fortified city, 142 years after it had been destroyed.

D. NEHEMIAH'S SECOND TERM:

Nehemiah served as governor in Jerusalem during two terms. He was governor the first time for twelve years and then returned to his former position in the Persian Court.

After being in the Persian capital for a short time, he was commissioned the second time to be the governor at Jerusalem. There seems to be no record stating just how long Nehemiah served this second time.

E. NEHEMIAH'S WORK AND REFORMS:

1. SECURITY:

After the wall was completed, Nehemiah placed Hananiah in charge of security. He had one-tenth of the population move to Jerusalem. This gave Jerusalem greater security.

2. REMISSION OF DEBTS: (Nehemiah 5:1-9).

Nehemiah took action to remit the debts of the poor people. Some of the wealthy took advantage of the heavy Persian taxes and poor crops to loan the poor money. When they could not pay their debts, the wealthy then took possession of their property. Nehemiah appealed to the people to stop this practice and restore what they had taken. Nehemiah set a personal example by refusing to accept a salary for being Governor.

3. READING GOD'S LAW: (Nehemiah 8-10).

Nehemiah encouraged the people to assemble to hear God's Word read. Ezra did this. The Feast of the Tabernacles was kept followed by a public confession of sin. A covenant to keep God's Law was signed by Nehemiah and the leaders.

4. DEDICATION OF THE WALLS: (Nehemiah 12:27-47).

Formal dedication of the walls was made. The people formed two processions and marched in opposite directions around the walls meeting together at the Temple. There was much singing and praising God which could be heard for a great distance.

5. COLLECTION OF TITHES:

Nehemiah insisted that the people tithe. Certain rooms were set apart to receive the tithes. He ordered that the tithes would be brought with great care.

6. KEEPING THE SABBATH:

There was much laxity in respecting the Sabbath. Many of the Jews worked and did business on the Sabbath. Nehemiah closed the city gates and prohibited all merchandising on the Sabbath Day.

7. MIXED MARRIAGES ENDED: (Nehemiah 13:23-28).

In spite of Ezra's efforts, the sin of mixed marriages still existed. Nehemiah did not have the marriages dissolved, but the people had to swear that there would be not more mixed marriages.

F. OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY ENDED WITH NEHEMIAH:

By Nehemiah's time, seventeen centuries had passed since the call of Abraham. The Old Testament records no more history after Nehemiah. Now there are 400 silent years until the time of Christ. The Old Testament closes during the period of time that the Persian Empire ruled the Middle East.

The efforts of the Persian kings to conquer Greece were never successful. Ultimately Alexander the Great appeared on the scene. He conquered Tyre and took Egypt. Then he

struck at the Persian Empire and won the Battle of Arbela. The empire of Cyrus lasted about 200 years.

Alexander died young and his empire was divided among four generals.

Ptolemy was given Palestine and the Jews fared well. During this time, the translation of the Scriptures into Greek was started. This version became known as the Septuagint.

Alexander's general, Seleucia was given Syria and soon acquired nearly all of Asia. The cities of Seleucia and Antioch were built.

During the reign of the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus the Great, Palestine was taken and added to the Syrian Kingdom. This became one of the darkest periods in the history of the Jews. Antiochus Epiphanies slew 40,000 Jews and sold 40,000 as slaves. He desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a sow on the altar. Later he made a terrible massacre and demolished the city and its walls.

For a period of time, there was glorious deliverance, which came with the Maccabees. This lasted for about 100 years before the Romans who were in power when Jesus was born conquered Palestine.

LESSON TWELVE

SELF HELP TEST

Fill in the following blanks with the correct word.

1. Nehemiah was a _____ to King Artaxerxes.
2. The wall was completed in _____ days.
3. Nehemiah served as governor in Jerusalem _____ terms.
4. Nehemiah prohibited all _____ on the Sabbath Day.
5. _____ won the Battle of Arbela.
6. Alexander's empire was divided among _____ generals.
7. _____ was Nehemiah's brother.
8. One of the leaders of the opposition was _____.
9. Nehemiah refused to accept a _____ for being Governor.
10. Nehemiah insisted that the people _____.
11. The people had to swear that there would be no more _____ marriages.
12. After Nehemiah, there were _____ silent years.
13. _____ offered a sow on the altar of the Temple.
14. The _____ brought glorious deliverance to the Jews.
15. Alexander's general _____ was given control of Palestine.
16. Nehemiah spent _____ months in prayer before making his request of the King.
17. At the dedication of the walls, the people formed _____ processions.
18. Nehemiah had _____ of the population move to Jerusalem.
19. _____ assigned soldiers to accompany Nehemiah.
20. Nehemiah divided the workers into _____ groups.