

1. In the face of serious opposition, the walls of Jerusalem, broken down for a century and a half, are rebuilt in 52 days.

2. “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night.” (Nehemiah 9:4) “Watch and pray.” (Matthew 26:41) Fervently pray and be an activist - the model of Nehemiah.

3. Nehemiah was the Governor of Jerusalem from 445-433 BC. Sanballat, the Governor of Samaria felt threatened by such a strong leader, so he resorted to threats, lies, and murder plots against Nehemiah.

4. “I am carrying on a great work and cannot go down.” (Nehemiah 6:3) He was focused on what God wanted him to do. It took only 52 days, and then there was a more leisurely time of perfecting and strengthening those walls.

5. In the middle of the 52 days, Nehemiah does stop the work - to address the issue of economic reform, specifically usury.

6. As soon as Nehemiah became aware of the injustice going on, he addressed it.

A. He wanted to bring the people into conformity with God’s laws so that they would be blessed.

B. He wanted to restore the morale of the people who were hungry and selling their children into slavery, due to the unjust practice of usury.

C. God is angry with unfair interest rates on a loan and those taking advantage of other people in desperate circumstances.

D. As Christians, we need to decide if a need is legitimate, the person involved responsible, and then consider gifting them what they need. We must not give them an interest-laden loan.

7. “God’s choice servants will, at His leading, decide to lay away their rights in order to be better servants to the people.” Nehemiah was a choice servant of God.

1. Nehemiah 7 begins with the events that happened after the completion of the wall.
 - A. The Temple workers were all assigned to guarding the gates and walls of the city.
 - B. Hanani (Hananiah), Nehemiah's brother, was put in charge of them.
 - C. Jerusalem is under-populated so Nehemiah looks for the original list of the returnees (the one in the Book of Ezra).
 - 1) The number of people listed among the laity is different in the 2 lists.
 - a) The slash marks used in Hebrew for notating numbers makes it easy for mistakes to happen.
 - b) Once a scribe made a mistake, no other scribe, even seeing the discrepancy, would change it.
 - c) Inerrancy demands that the "autographs" (originals) are without error.
 - 2) The returning people went back to their ancestral towns to live - there were few survivors of the Babylonian attack in Jerusalem, so it was not home for most of them.
2. Ezra reappears after a gap of about 13 years. He is called upon read the Book of the Law of Moses, most likely all 5 books of the Torah.
 - A. The teachers of the law either translated or interpreted the law for the people and they were filled with joy and excitement. It was the first time many of them had understood it.
 - B. They were filled with remorse and shame because they understood they were sinners.
 - C. They were told that this was a day of rejoicing, not weeping.
 - D. The reading of the law lead to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths).
 - 1) Celebrated the 15th of Tishri (September/October) for 7 days (Leviticus 23:39-43)
 - 2) One of the 3 great feasts, along with Passover and Pentecost
 - 3) All the men were to assemble in Jerusalem.
 - 4) A feast to celebrate the harvest - a joyous time
 - 5) This particular feast day was memorable.
 - 6) After the feast was over, it was time to mourn over their sin. (The 9th chapters of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel are all devoted to confession of national sin and prayer for God's grace.)
 - a) Nehemiah 9 is one of the longest prayers in the Bible.
 - i. It is a prayer of repentance that emphasizes 2 things: Israel's rebelliousness (from Abraham to Mt Sinai; from Sinai to the Promised Land; ending with, "We are in great distress, we are in bondage with foreign kings ruling over us.") and God's patience ("You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in love. Therefore you did not desert them.")
 - ii. It is a prelude to commitment.

1. It is important, apparently, to keep good records. We learn from Daniel that set times for prayer are important. Nehemiah shows us that we are not too busy to keep good records.

2. Journaling is a practice that can benefit us personally, and benefit others as they later read our stories.

3. The covenant Nehemiah and the others made with God after the reading of the Law of Moses and the Feast of Tabernacles:
 - A. There would be no intermarriage with the foreign population - no return to idolatry.
 - B. They would preserve the Sabbath by refusing to buy goods on that day.
 - C. They would obey the law regarding a Sabbath rest for the land.
 - D. They would bring annual offerings in support of the ministry of the Temple of 1/3 of a shekel.
 - E. They would bring a tithe of everything to the Temple of the Lord - the first and best part belongs to the Lord.

4. The appointed times of the Temple service were determined by casting lots. This practice of discerning the will of God disappeared from Scripture after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

5. The priests and Levites could devote themselves fully to the work of the ministry because they were supported from the tithes and offerings of the people.

1. Today we finished Nehemiah, read about the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem and about the final reforms Governor Nehemiah initiated.

2. 12:10 notes the list of high priests: Jeshua (Joshua), Joiakim, Eliashib, Joiada, Jonathan, Jaddua.
 - A. There are often gaps in lists in the Bible.
 - B. Grandsons were often named for their grandfathers, so the same names keep occurring in lists.

3. The dedication of the walls of Jerusalem:
 - A. It was a great celebration.
 - B. There were 2 great choirs. Nehemiah went with one choir and Ezra with the other.
 - C. There were all sorts of musical instruments.
 - D. The singers and the gatekeepers are given prominence in this account. All gifts are important.

4. Nehemiah had received permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. When they were finished, he stayed on as governor for 12 years. He returned to Susa to again serve the king. Some time later, he returned to Jerusalem, again as governor.

5. Discoveries upon his return:
 - A. Eliashib the priest had provided Tobiah, the enemy of God's people, with a room in the Temple precincts. This was a violation of the holiness of the Temple and Nehemiah reacts violently and acts decisively.
 - B. The allotted provisions for the priests and Levites were not being brought forward, so they had returned to their fields and the work of the Temple had been abandoned.
 - C. The people had forgotten their pledge concerning the Sabbath.
 - D. Intermarriage was again happening - even the high priest's son Joiada was guilty of this.

6. Nehemiah's 4 bullet prayers in Nehemiah 13 begin with "remember":
 - A. "Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services." Don't let my life's work be lost!
 - B. "Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love." He is referring to his reestablishment of the Sabbath laws.
 - C. Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites." Don't forget those who have broken their promises to you, God.
 - D. "Remember me with favor, O my God." He had re-purified everything associated with the Temple.

1. Today we began Esther. It is the fifth book in the third section of the Hebrew Bible, along with Song of Solomon, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations.
2. It records for us the feast of Purim, the last festival of the Jewish year. Purim and Hanukkah are the 2 feasts celebrated by the Jewish people that are not prescribed in the Torah.
3. Two Old Testament books are named for a woman (Esther and Ruth); Esther and Song of Solomon are the only books that do not mention the name of God.
4. Xerxes (aka Ahasuerus) is the father of the Artaxerxes of Ezra and Nehemiah. His capital is Susa. He reigned from 486-465 BC. His empire ranged from Ethiopia to India.
5. There is anti-Semitism in Persia. It is ultimately rooted in Satan's hatred for God and His chosen people.
6. Difficulties in the text we read today:
 - A. There is no mention of the word "God." But the hand of providence is all over it.
 - B. A lack of moral fiber is evident in Mordecai and Esther - they hide the fact that she is Jewish.
 - C. Esther's willingness to marry a pagan king runs counter to everything we see in the Old Testament code.
 - D. Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman precipitates the crisis - he was not asked to worship Haman, but to respect him.
7. The picture of Xerxes in this book is consistent with what secular historians say about him. He threw lavish parties; his campaigns against the Greeks fit exactly into the time frame where there is a gap in time between Esther 1:3 and 2:16. Xerxes had 7 advisers, as did the Persian kings of this period.
8. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform..." His providence:
 - A. He worked through evil Haman, whose anti-Semitism knew no bounds.
 - B. He worked through conniving Mordecai.
 - C. He worked through Esther, who was unwilling to be openly counted as a follower of Jehovah.
 - D. "The providence of God, the hand of God moving in the events of time and the affairs of men and women to accomplish His purpose in the redemption and salvation of His people is what we need to be looking for as we move through the Book of Esther."