

(105) Adult Sunday School Class
Nehemiah, chpts. 1-7
Chronicles, pp. 115-129



Part 1 of 2

The book of Nehemiah continues the story which began in the book of Ezra. In fact, originally the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were combined. All of the earliest Hebrew manuscripts and Greek translations have Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Even though both books tell part of the story in the first person, the personal pronouns in the Old Testament do not necessarily indicate autobiographical authorship. According to Jewish tradition, Ezra wrote both volumes.

The Jews return to Jerusalem in three waves. A leader named Zerubbabel leads the first group in 538 BC to rebuild the Temple. In 458 BC Ezra, a priest and teacher of the Law, leads the second group of Jews back to Jerusalem and then tries to get them organized so they can worship God properly. Nehemiah, appointed by the Persians to be governor over Judah, brings a third group in 445 BC with the primary goal to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

The Temple reconstruction in Jerusalem was completed in 515 BC. Nehemiah is a Jewish man working in the palace with the additional responsibility as the king's cup-bearer in Susa, capital of the vast Persian Empire (present day Iran). In 446 BC, one of his brothers had just returned from visiting Jerusalem (~2,000 mile round-trip), and gives Nehemiah a distressing report, "things are not going well. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down and the gates have been destroyed by fire" (1:3).

Nehemiah asks the king of Persia for a leave of absence to travel to Jerusalem to help rebuild the wall to provide the city with a means to defend itself. The first half of the book of Nehemiah tells the miraculous story of how Jerusalem's walls were rebuilt in 52 days.
More next week...