

NEHEMIAH

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

This book is, by the authors of the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions, called the “Second” Book of Ezra, it being a continuation of the same history, and was by the Jews reckoned as one book with Ezra; Kimchi on (~~<2300>~~Isaiah 9:7), calls it Ezra, so the Talmud^{f1}; and it has been quoted by Christian writers under his name; see the argument of the book of Ezra; but not as if it was written by him; for it is a clear case it was written by Nehemiah, whose name it bears, as appears from (~~<4000>~~Nehemiah 1:1) and throughout Nehemiah speaks of himself under the first person; and the style also is very different from that of Ezra, being plainer and easier than his. It has always had a place in the canon of Scriptures, both with Jews and Christians; and is of use to show the fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah, and especially of Daniel concerning the building of the wall of Jerusalem in troublesome times; to carry on the history of the Jews, and describe the state of the church in those times, what opposition was made to it, and what enemies it had, and what must be expected when any work of God is set about; it is the last of the historical books that was written, as is thought, and contains an history of the space of about twelve years, from the twentieth of Artaxerxes to the thirty second of his reign, (see ~~<4000>~~Nehemiah 1:1 2:1 13:6).

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION NEHEMIAH 1

This chapter relates how that Nehemiah, being at Shushan in Persia, and meeting with some Jews, inquired of the state of Jerusalem, of which having a melancholy account, he betook to mourning, fasting, and prayer, (~~<K001>~~Nehemiah 1:1-4), and his prayer is recorded, (~~<K005>~~Nehemiah 1:5-11).

Ver. 1. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah*, etc.] Or his transactions and deeds; for **yrbd** “dibre” signifies things done, as well as words spoken; who Hachaliah his father was is not known; the Arabic version adds, the high priest, without any foundation; though some have thought that Nehemiah was a priest, from a passage in

“Therefore whereas we are now purposed to keep the purification of the temple upon the five and twentieth day of the month Chisleu, we thought it necessary to certify you thereof, that ye also might keep it, as the feast of the tabernacles, and of the fire, which was given us when Neemias offered sacrifice, after that he had builded the temple and the altar.” (2 Maccabees 1:18)

and from signing and sealing the covenant at the head of priests, (~~<K001>~~Nehemiah 10:1), but he rather seems to be of the tribe of Judah, (see ~~<K005>~~Nehemiah 2:3,5), and Nehemiah may be the same that went up with Zerubbabel, and returned again, and then became the king’s cupbearer; though some are of another opinion, (See Gill on “~~<K002>~~Ezra 2:2”)

and it came to pass in the month Chisleu; the ninth month, as the Arabic version; of which (see ~~<K005>~~Ezra 10:9),

in the twentieth year; not of Nehemiah’s age, for, if he went up with Zerubbabel, he must be many years older; but in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, (~~<K001>~~Nehemiah 1:1),

as I was in Shushan the palace; a city in Persia, the royal seat of the kings of it; as Ecbatana was in the summer time, this in the spring, as Cyrus made it, according to Xenophon^{f2}; but others say^{f3} it was their seat in winter,

and this was the season now when Nehemiah was with the king there; for Chisleu was a winter month, answering to part of November and of December; of Shushan, (see Gill on “~~<ARABIC>~~ Daniel 8:2”), to which may be added what a traveller of the last century says ^{f4} of it,

“we rested at Valdac, once the great city Susa, but now very ruinous; it was first built by Tythonus, and his son Memnon, but enlarged by Darius the son of Hystaspes; in the building whereof Memnon was so exceeding prodigal, that, as Cassiodorus writeth, he joined the stones together with gold--such was the beauty and delectableness of it for situation, that they called it “Susa”, which in the Persian tongue signified a “lily”, but now it is called Valdac, because of the poverty of the place;”

and it is generally supposed to have its name from the abundance of lilies about it; but Dr. Hyde ^{f5} gives another signification of its name, he says the Persians called it <Arabic>, “Sus”, which signifies “liquorice”, but for what reasons he says not. There is a city now called Shustera, and is thought by some travellers to be built at least very near where Shushan formerly stood ^{f6}.

Ver. 2. *That Hanani, one of my brethren*, etc.] Either in natural relation, (~~<ARABIC>~~ Nehemiah 7:2), or being a Jew of the same nation and religion; so Jarchi interprets it, one of my companions or acquaintance:

he and certain men of Judah; who came from thence to Shushan on some account or another:

and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity; who were returned from it to their own land; he inquired of their health and prosperity, in what circumstances they were, whether prosperous or adverse, whether they flourished, or were in distress:

and concerning Jerusalem; whether it was rebuilt, the houses and walls of it, and in what condition it was.

Ver. 3. *And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province*, etc.] In Judea, now reduced to a province of the Persian empire:

are in great affliction and reproach; harassed and distressed, calumniated and vilified, by their enemies the Samaritans:

the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burnt with fire; that is, its wall and gates were in the same condition in which Nebuchadnezzar had left them, for since his times as yet they had never been set up; for this is not to be understood of what was lately done by their adversaries, which is not at all probable.

Ver. 4. *And it came to pass, when I heard these words*, etc.] This sad and melancholy account of things:

that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; sat down upon the ground in dust and ashes, after the manner of mourners, and wept bitterly, and mourned in a most sorrowful manner, (see ^{<808>}Job 2:8,12,13),

and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven; that made it, and dwells in it.

Ver. 5. *And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven*, etc.] He prayed not to the host of heaven, the sun in it, as the Persians, but to the God of it, in an humble supplicant manner:

the great and terrible God; who is to be feared, and had in reverence of all his creatures, because of his greatness and glory, being God over all, blessed for ever, and his name holy and reverend:

that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him, and observe his commandments; who keep them from a principle of love to him; to those he has made gracious promises in his covenant, which he truly and faithfully performs; and the consideration of these perfections in God animates and encourages good men in prayer to him.

Ver. 6. *Let thine ear be now attentive*, etc.] To his prayer, as in (^{<801>}Nehemiah 1:11),

and thine eyes open; to behold with pity and compassion the distressed case of Jerusalem, and the Jews in it:

I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants; this he had continued to do ever since he heard of their trouble and calamity:

and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned; he considered sin as the cause of all this evil that had befallen his people, and confesses it

with sorrow and humiliation, and not their sins only, but his own personal and family sins.

Ver. 7. *We have dealt very corruptly against thee*, etc.] Corrupted his covenant, laws, and precepts, as well as themselves, ways, and works; all which were against the Lord, contrary to his nature, mind, and will:

and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses; the laws, moral, ceremonial, and judicial.

Ver. 8. *Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses*, etc.] To publish and declare to the children of Israel, (⁽⁴⁸³⁴⁾Deuteronomy 28:64 30:3-5),

saying, if ye transgress; the law of God:

I will scatter you abroad among the nations; as now they had been among the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Medes, and Persians.

Ver. 9. *But if ye return unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them*, etc.] Return by repentance, and, as a proof of the genuineness of it, yield obedience to the commands of God, and continue therein:

though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven; that is, the uttermost parts of the earth, the most distant regions; so called, because at the extreme parts of the horizon, according to our apprehension, the heavens and earth touch each other; so that what is the uttermost part of the one is supposed to be of the other:

yet will I gather them from thence and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there; that is to Jerusalem where the temple was built, and his name was called upon.

Ver. 10. *Now these are thy servants, and thy people*, etc.] Meaning those that were in Jerusalem and Judah, gathered out of several countries, and returned to Jerusalem:

whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand; touching and moving the heart of Cyrus to proclaim liberty to them.

Ver. 11. *O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant*, etc.] To the prayer of Nehemiah, put up at this time:

and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name; the prayer of the Jews in Judea, whose desire was to worship the Lord in his temple, according to his will:

and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day; meaning himself, who was to wait on the king of Persia that day, and, if he had opportunity, intended to lay the case of the Jews before him, and therefore entreats he might meet with success:

and grant him mercy in the sight of this man; King Artaxerxes, who was but a man, and whose heart was in the hands of God, and he could easily move him to pity and compassion towards his poor people the Jews:

for I was the king's cupbearer; in the execution of which office he was often in the king's presence, and hoped to have an opportunity of speaking to him in the behalf of the Jews; this with the Persians was reckoned a very honourable office ^{f7}. A son of Prexaspes, a very honourable man, was made cupbearer to Cambyses; and so it was with the Greeks and Romans ^{f8}; and the poets not only make Ganymedes to be Jupiter's cupbearer ^{f9}, but even Vulcan himself is put into this office ^{f10}.