

## NEHEMIAH

### INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah was a government official, a cupbearer to the king. A cupbearer was more than one who served food and drink to the king. He would be the “taster” to assure the food was safe and no poison had been added to it. Nehemiah was the most trusted person in the whole empire.

The main subject of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem after the exile. The first priority of the Jewish exiles was Ezra’s rebuilding of their temple and the restoration of their religious forms. Nehemiah also deals with an effort to revitalize the nation’s spiritual life through public reading of the Law.

### CHAPTER 1

#### Verse 1

Susa was the city in Edom, 200 miles east of Babylon where the Persian King maintained a part-time residence.

#### Verse 3

This verse indicates both physical and mental distress because of the city’s wall and gates. Nebuchadnezzar had broken down the stone wall and burnt the wooden posts 141 years earlier.

#### Verse 4

Without walls the city would have no defense against vandalism or military actions except what human bodies could supply.

#### Verse 5

Nehemiah’s prayer speaks well of his habits of spirituality and fellowship with God. He praises God for His greatness and loving kindness.

#### Verse 6

This verse speaks of Nehemiah’s persistence day and night and moves to confession of some of their sins in verse 7.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Verse 2**

This verse reveals the intimacy that would have existed between a king and his cupbearer. The king recognized Nehemiah's obvious sadness, he surmised it was caused by grief.

### **Verse 5**

Nehemiah requested that he be sent to Judah to rebuild his home city.

### **Verse 7**

Nehemiah asked for the necessary papers to get him to his destination. He would need documents showing his authority and the backing of the Persian king to travel along the Euphrates and Jordan Rivers.

### **Verse 8**

Nehemiah asks for supplies to rebuild the fortress by the temple, repair the walls, and build a house as his own headquarters as governor.

### **Verse 10**

Sanballat was governor of Samaria. Tobiah was appointed to govern the Ammonites north and east of Judah. Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem and begins to inspect the walls' damage.

### **Verse 12**

We learn that his inspection was done under cover at night, with a few trusted associates.

### **Verse 17**

Nehemiah said, "Come, let us rebuild." Two reasons seem to be on his mind.

1. To improve their physical situation, and
2. To improve their morale, their reasons for lacking self-respect and being ashamed.

Their response was, "Let us arise and build."

### **Verse 19**

Opposition arises, Sanballat and Tobiah are joined by Geshem, governor of Arabia. They use ridicule saying you are rebuilding the walls to mount a rebellion which would be futile.

### **Verse 20**

Nehemiah is given assurance of God's blessing. They would succeed because they were God's servants.

## **CHAPTER 3**

They began rebuilding the walls section by section. The builders were from many backgrounds. They were men of religion, government officials, businessmen, people from the cities, and the women.

### **Verse 5**

One gate was provided with a cover, or roof. Here the merchants came each evening to make their goods available to the inhabitants. The merchants used other gates also. Some of the people worked close to the official seat of the governor while some rebuilt the wall close to their home.

### **Verse 11**

The furnace tower refers to the baking ovens. In some places the walls had to be totally rebuilt, in other places they could be repaired, and in some areas they could be left as they were.

One thing is apparent, the willingness of each group to do its part. A city wall with one gap is useless.

## **CHAPTER 4**

Here we can see that the building of the walls had various obstacles and opposition. The enemies try to ridicule and use rumor to block construction, but the work progresses in spite of them.

## **Verse 2**

Sanballat's mockery begins. He says the Jews are feeble which may suggest that if they had tended their crops instead of rebuilding the walls, they would not be as weak from hunger as they are now. Secondly, he suggests that they cannot build the walls without his help.

Then he says the Jews are foolish to think that by making sacrifices to God they would gain His favor and be able to finish their work quickly. If this mockery was not enough, Sanballat says to look at all the rubbish and you will be discouraged.

## **Verse 3**

Tobiah says that the walls they rebuild, a fox could break them down if he jumped on it.

## **Verses 4-5**

Nehemiah prays that God would be aware of the ridicule and that their enemies be repaid for their evil blocking of God's approved plan.

## **Verse 5**

The work progressed to the half-way stage.

## **Verse 7**

The threat of actual hostility begins. It was not a direct military destruction of Jerusalem because their armies were insufficient, but they could cause confusion and stop the work in this manner.

## **Verse 13**

Nehemiah stationed people from various families at the more vulnerable locations.

## **Verse 15**

God frustrated the enemies' plan and they continued to rebuild the walls. They worked from dawn to dusk.

## **CHAPTER 5**

From this chapter we learn of a new problem, internal dissension. The workers received no income and this kind of toil produced no consumer goods; hunger was the inevitable result.

Opportunists arose to become wealthy at the expense of the hard pressed. Many had gone into debt and mortgaged their property and now they were about to lose everything. Taxes were also an enormous burden. Some families had already sold their children into slavery.

### **Verse 7**

Nehemiah appeals to all the people. The purpose for making a loan should be to help the needy, not to enrich the lender. The lenders consented to Nehemiah's appeal to restore the land, crops, and belongings to the people.

## **CHAPTER 6**

The three governors, except for Tobiah, return with a plot to lead Nehemiah out from his defenders to a secluded spot outside the city and if not to assassinate him at least beat him soundly. But Nehemiah refuses to leave his work.

### **Verse 5**

They try a new tactic, a letter designed to expose Nehemiah's ulterior motives; rebuilding the wall as a prelude to leading the Jewish people in rebellion so that Nehemiah could become king.

### **Verses 10-14**

We see Tobiah's plan revealed. Shemaiah, possibly a priest, and Nehemiah were to hide in the temple; Shemaiah would be spared, but Nehemiah would be executed for violating the Law. Nehemiah again sees through their trickery and refuses to enter the temple.

### **Verse 15**

The wall was completed in fifty-two days.

## **CHAPTER 7**

Nehemiah finds the list of the first exiles to return and retraces their genealogies.

## **CHAPTER 8**

The people make a request that the Law of Moses be read to them. Ezra is the one who reads the Law to them.

### **Verse 4**

The first mention of a raised platform constructed for speaking is mentioned. It was built large enough to accommodate fourteen people.

### **Verse 8**

This verse implies that the thirteen also helped read the Law. The people wept at their shortcomings now revealed by the reading of the Law. Ezra and Nehemiah exhort the Jews to turn their sorrow into joy because there is power that comes through joy.

### **Verse 14**

The people discovered that they had failed to build temporary living quarters during the Feast of Booths. As a result, leafy shelters sprang up all over Jerusalem.

### **Verse 17**

This had not been done since Joshua's day.

## **CHAPTER 9**

They had already had nine or ten days of Scripture reading and worship, and they still would not go home.

### **Verse 2**

The separating from foreigners was a ritual of purification.

### **Verse 5**

This is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible. It begins with praise to God for His power, glory, and mighty acts.

## **CHAPTER 10**

A document is drawn up and sealed by all the leaders pledging to walk in God's law, to keep His commandments and not to intermarry with foreigners. They also pledged to support the temple with money and materials and to see that the house of God was not neglected.

## **CHAPTER 11**

An effort was made to coax more exiles to come to Jerusalem. They were needed to help build a stable economy and for defense of the city.

No one seemed to want to live in Jerusalem so lots were cast and one-tenth was chosen as residents. The rest remained in the villages.

## **CHAPTER 12**

This chapter lists the religious leaders who contributed to Jerusalem's restoration. There were over 4,000 priests who returned to Jerusalem. Next follows a description of their genealogies and the rebuilding of the walls.