

## *Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories*

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit [www.UjimaChurch.org](http://www.UjimaChurch.org)

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### **33 - Highlights from Nehemiah 1-10, "Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls"**

In the days of the rebuilding of the Temple under of Ezra the priest and scribe, a Jew named Nehemiah served as the cupbearer for the Persian King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins from the days of the destruction of the city under the Babylonians, and the people there were in a sad state. In grief, Nehemiah prayed and fasted, asking that the Lord would show mercy and help his people (ch.1). When the king inquired about his sad countenance, Nehemiah explained that he was in distress over the situation in Jerusalem, telling the king about his prayers that God would help his people. The Lord moved upon the king's heart and the king approved Nehemiah's request to go to Jerusalem with all he would need to rebuild the walls of the city (ch.2).

As the newly appointed governor in Jerusalem, Nehemiah inspected what was left of the walls, which had been destroyed by fire many years before. He then gathered the people and said to them, *"You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."* 18 *And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' So they strengthened their hands for the good work"* (Neh 2:17-18 ESV).

While most of the Jewish people rallied to rebuild (ch.3), for "the people had a mind to work" (Neh 4:6), there were those who were less excited about it. Their non-Jewish neighbors mocked the rebuilding effort and attempted to discourage the work. They intimidated the workers, but the Lord used Nehemiah to embolden his people, *"And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, 'Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes.'" (Neh 4:14 ESV).*

Nehemiah continued the work by dividing his workforce, with half working on the walls while the other was armed for battle and standing guard. Even the builders were armed with swords so they could be ready to rally a defense at the sound of a trumpet calling them to fight. Nehemiah remarked, *"So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor*

*the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand"* (Neh 4:23 ESV).

During the effort to restore the walls of Jerusalem, some of the rich and powerful from among the people were taking advantage of the poor, making themselves richer as the poor were finding it hard to feed themselves. High interest was being charged on loans from the rich to the poor, leaving the poor destitute. An angry Nehemiah spoke out against the injustice, shaming the perpetrators and summoning them to "walk in the fear of God," which brought the repentance of many and a change in their unjust practices (ch.5). Nehemiah also set a high example of personal generosity. For twelve years he did not take the food allowance due to him as the governor, nor did he allow his associates to take any advantage that would burden the people.

Opponents of the wall restoration conspired against Nehemiah, promoting the notion that his project would result in the Jews rebelling against the Persian Empire. Nehemiah's response to this lie and attack on his character was to find confidence in the Lord through prayer and to finish the wall (ch. 6).

The people gathered to dedicate the finished work in Jerusalem and to rededicated themselves. Ezra read the Law that the Lord had given through Moses as the people listened and as the Levites explained its meaning. Grief fell upon the people when they realized how far they had fallen from the commands of God, but Nehemiah reassured the people, saying, *"This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep... Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength"* (Neh 8:9-10 ESV). The people celebrated the Lord and observed the Feast of Booths, confessing their sins and renewing their commitment to the Lord (ch.9&10).