



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

# BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**EZRA, NEHEMIAH, HAGGAI,  
ZECHARIAH & MALACHI**

Week 2



# Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

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DAY 8

Ezra 10

Paul confessed, "...I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Ro 7:18-19).

## **OPENING**

up to the Word

**1.** Israel, instead of being stubborn, realized their sin was a serious issue. How did they demonstrate this to Ezra (v. 1)?

## **DIGGING**

into the Word

**2.** It was necessary for the people to acknowledge their sin against God. How did they demonstrate their repentance was genuine (v. 11)?

**1.** Is there a sinful habit in your life that, if you gave it up, would cause damage to other areas of your life, or to other people? What would be the cost of giving up your sin? What about the cost of continuing your sin?

## **LIVING**

out the Word

**2.** What is your attitude toward your sin? (a) not yet willing to give it up; (b) don't want to give it up, but know you need to; (c) want to give it up, but are afraid of the consequences; (d) confess that you are powerless to give it up—and lay it at the foot of the cross.

# *Introduction to Nehemiah*

**Authorship:** Many commentators believe that Nehemiah wrote the book that bears his name. Most of the book is a first hand account of the circumstances he experienced in his difficult struggle to rebuild the city and the faith of his people. Little is known about Nehemiah's background, except that his father's name was Hacaliah and he had a brother named Hanani. Nehemiah was born in Persia sometime during or soon after the ministry of Zerubbabel in Jerusalem.

**Date:** The book was written about 430 B.C.

**Setting and purpose:** While there had been two returns of people to Israel to rebuild the Temple and the city, much work also needed to be done in repairing the hearts of the people. So God raised up a man named Nehemiah, a faithful Jew who had risen to prominence in the court of Artaxerxes as his personal cupbearer. The official job of the cupbearer was to test every drink given to the king to prevent poisoning. This was a position of great honor and confidentiality, and it allowed Nehemiah to wield great influence. He would operate much as a presidential counselor or advisor would today.

One day his brother Hanani came back from Israel with a report that overwhelmed him with grief. The people in Judea were hanging on by a thread, and the walls were in exactly the same condition they had been in after the Babylonians had destroyed them 140 years earlier. This prompted Nehemiah to go into mourning and fasting and to hatch a risky plan. He went into his king's presence with sadness (which, in the book of Esther, we read was a capital offense) and prayed that Artaxerxes would extend mercy. Artaxerxes did extend mercy, and commissioned Nehemiah to go and see to the task of rebuilding.

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 444 B.C., about 14 years after Ezra had returned. He organized the physical construction, as well as the return of the people to their faith. What God accomplished through him in the face of huge obstacles, and in

the presence of hostile and dangerous enemies and discouragements, is an incredible feat.

**Reading outline:**

**I. REBUILDING THE WALLS, 1-6**

- A. A Prayer of Hope, 1
- B. Rebuilding Faith and Walls, 2
- C. Volunteers Needed, 3
- D. Working Through Discouragement, 4
- E. Conflicts of Interest, 5
- F. A Clear and Present Danger, 6

**II. RESTORING THE PEOPLE, 7-13**

- A. It's the Law, 7-8
- B. Put It in Writing, 9
- C. Back to the Future, 10-11
- D. How Soon We Forget, 12-13

*“In the month of Nisan in the  
twentieth year of King*

*Artaxerxes, when wine  
was brought for him,*

*I took the wine and  
gave it to the king. I*

*had not been sad  
in his presence*

*before; so the*

*king asked me,*

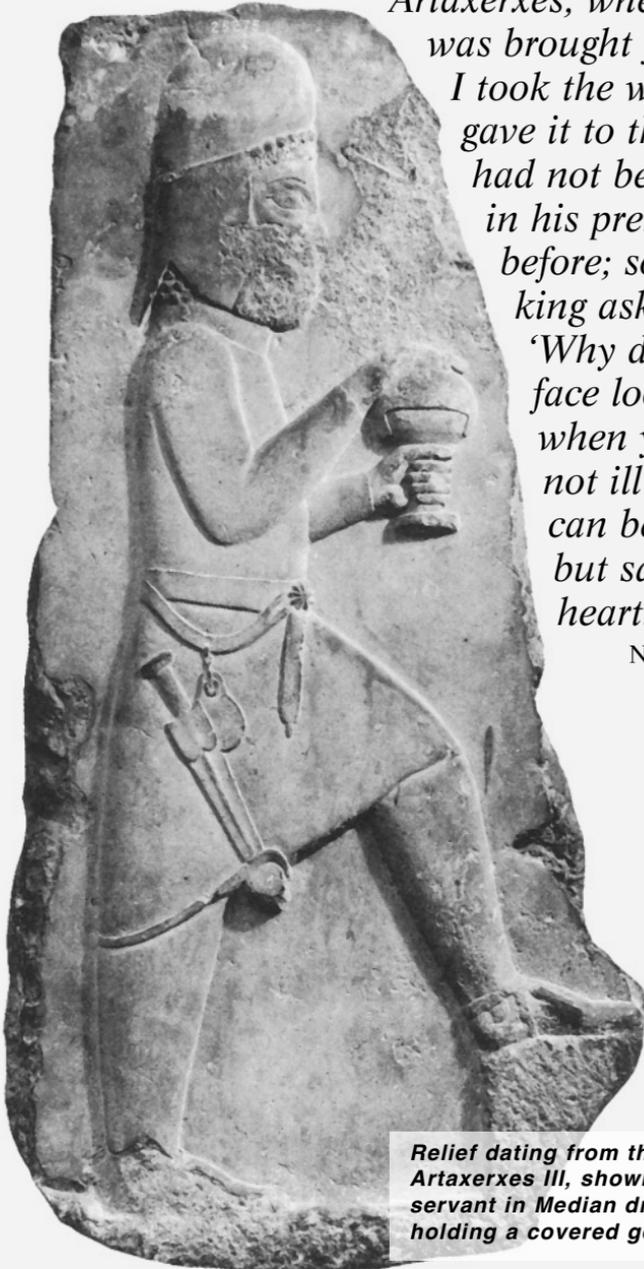
*‘Why does your  
face look so sad*

*when you are  
not ill? This*

*can be nothing  
but sadness of*

*heart.’”*

Nehemiah 2:1-2



**Relief dating from the reign of  
Artaxerxes III, showing a  
servant in Median dress,  
holding a covered goblet.**

# A Prayer of Hope

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DAY 9

## Nehemiah 1

God extends his grace and peace to us. Nehemiah, of course, lived under the old covenant—how much different would his life and that of the people he served had been if “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27) had been a reality rather than a “mystery” (Col 1:26)?

1. Distressing news reached Nehemiah about conditions in Israel. What was the situation (v. 3)?
2. How did Nehemiah respond to this distressing news (v. 4)? 3
3. With what man did Nehemiah hope God would grant him favor, and why (v. 11)?

1. What distressing circumstances are you facing today?
2. Do you fully trust in God, by his grace, to deliver you, through Christ, or does your confidence waver? Be assured and know that doubt is not a lack of faith—fear is the real enemy! Be encouraged as you read Philippians 4:13.

**Susa** (v. 1) was the site of the Persian winter palace. Nothing is known about **Nehemiah's** background except the identity of his father and brother. Nehemiah had probably been born in Persia and rose to prominence in the Persian government. His position as cup bearer was an intimate one, for he had to taste the wine served to the king to make sure it wasn't poisoned. He would be in the king's presence often.

### OPENING

up to the Word

### DIGGING

into the Word

### LIVING

out the Word

### WINDOW

on the Word

## Rebuilding Faith and Walls

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Nehemiah 2

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Discouragement can keep us from fully embracing the grace of God and trusting him without reservation. Are your fears driving you away from Jesus?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

1. How much time had passed between Nehemiah's prayer and the opportunity to come before the king (v. 1, also 1:1)?
2. Something about Nehemiah attracted the king's attention. What did he notice (2:2)? To what did he attribute Nehemiah's attitude?
3. Nehemiah already knew what he needed to ask King Artaxerxes. What two things did he request (vs. 7-8)?
4. What did Nehemiah do as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem (vs. 11-16)?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

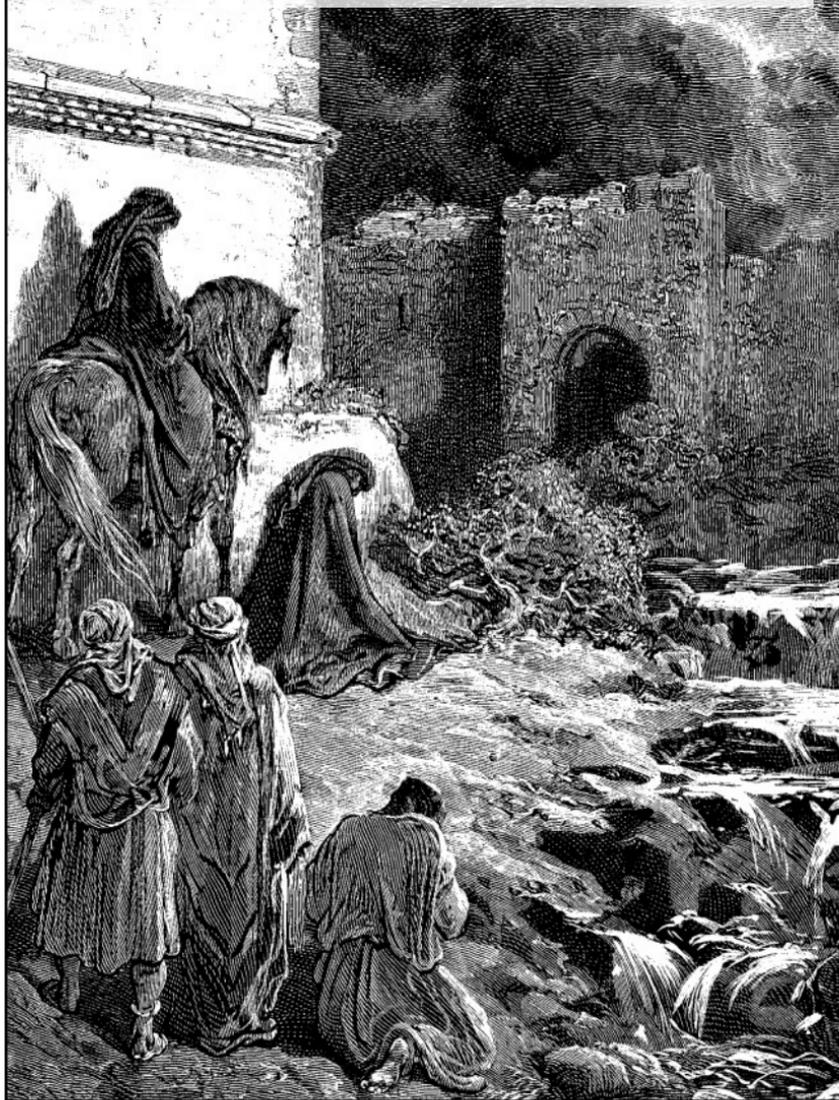
1. God sent Nehemiah to encourage the faith and actions of Israel. Who has God sent into your life to encourage you?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

*The month of **Nisan** (v. 1) was four months after Nehemiah had prayed for favor with the king. Evidently either the king had been gone, or Nehemiah had not been needed until then. Or, Nehemiah felt this was the proper time to make his real need known, as opposed to earlier. **Sanballat** (v. 10), according to the Elephantine Papyri, was governor of Samaria at this time. A rebuilt Jerusalem would be a threat to him and his power and influence in the area.*

*“Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’”*

Nehemiah 2:17



Artwork by Gustav Doré

## Volunteers Needed

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Nehemiah 3

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Have you ever been part of a volunteer project?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

**1.** Notice in this chapter how many people of different occupations became builders for this project. Are you ever willing to volunteer outside your area of expertise?

**2.** In this chapter of encouraging news about everyone getting involved, what is the exception (v. 5)?

**3.** What reasons do you think these slackers might have given for refusing to work?

**4.** How many gates were repaired at this time?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

**1.** How much time do you volunteer for outreach projects?

**2.** What do you enjoy most about volunteering? What is the hardest thing about it?

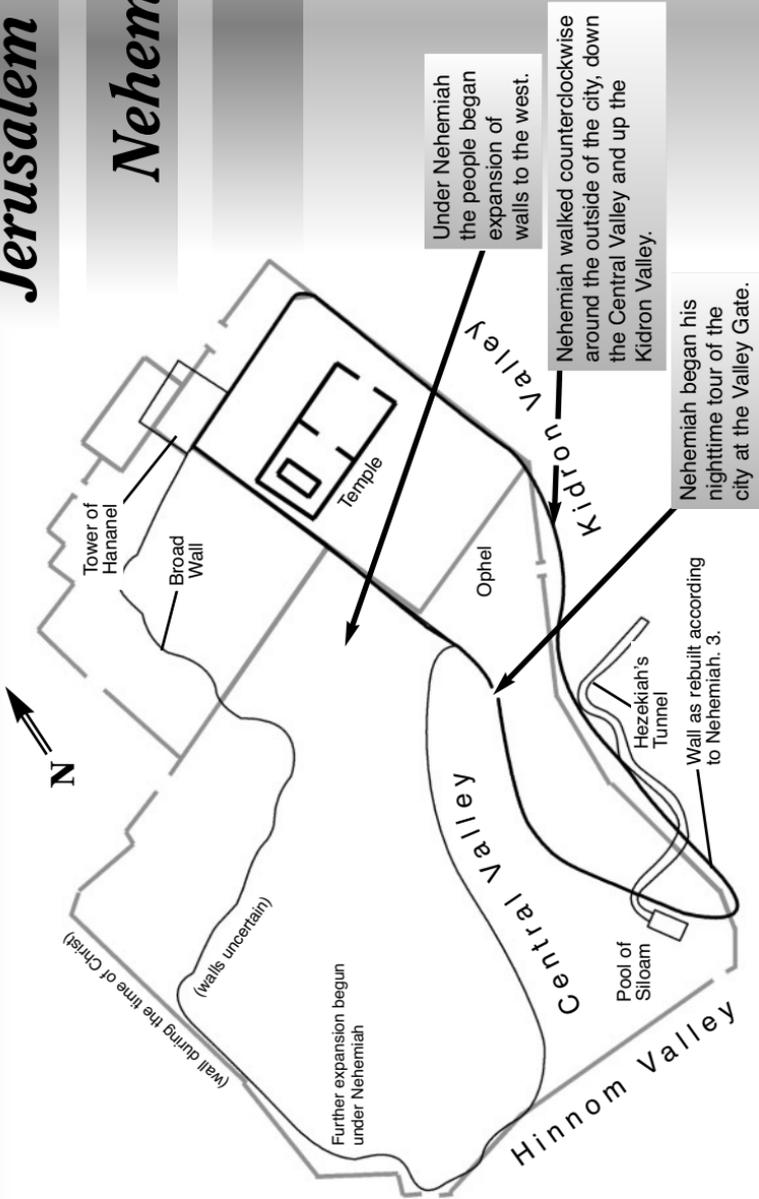
**3.** What is the worthiest project you ever worked on? What made it better than all the others?

**4.** Since the mind of Christ (Php 2:1-5) is one of humility and characterized by service to God and neighbor, do you feel Christ-followers are willing volunteers for a variety of needs and concerns?

# Jerusalem during

# Nehemiah's

# Time



## Working Through Discouragement

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Nehemiah 4

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Each of us has a different threshold of discouragement, and some challenges which discourage us may not cause discouragement in the life of a friend or loved one. How can we be sensitive to the issues that trouble others?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

1. What tool did Sanballat resort to in his attempt to stop the rebuilding (vs. 1-2)?
2. Do you think Nehemiah's reaction in verses 4-5 was: (a) way too strong, (b) a little too strong, (c) appropriate for the occasion?
3. What additional frustrations did the rebuilders face (vs. 8-12)?
4. In order to protect the people without stopping progress, how did Nehemiah solve the problem (vs. 16-23)?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

1. When was the last time you faced major discouragement? Looking back, do you feel God used others as his tools to help you in your time of need?
2. What are the three biggest discouragements you've ever faced in your journey with Christ? How did God give you the strength to persevere?

# Conflicts of Interest

DAY 13

## Nehemiah 5

It's easy to get into debt when times are hard, and the worse times get, the deeper in debt you can become. Have you ever *not* been in debt? Did you, or do you, feel like a slave?

1. What complaints interrupted the work on the wall (vs. 1-5)?
2. Who was making a profit at the workers' expense (v. 7)?
3. Nehemiah had been buying people out of slavery as much as he could (v. 8), but as soon as he would buy one out of slavery, another was sold into bondage. Do you think the nobles would have stopped this practice if Nehemiah had not taken the action he did?
4. A radical solution to the problem of debt was suggested by Nehemiah (v. 11). What did he suggest? What was the nobles' response (v. 12)?
5. How had Nehemiah set an example to the nobles by his own actions (vs. 14-18)?

1. Have you ever been so deeply in debt that you saw no way out?
2. Have you ever loaned money to someone in need? Did you charge them interest? Did they pay you back? Would you do it again?
3. Have you ever had a debt forgiven? If so, how did it feel? Have you ever forgiven someone else's debt to you?

**Exacting usury** (v. 7). *Loan sharks were making loans to the poor and then charging them high interest, a practice prohibited by the law (Lev 25:36). When the loans were unable to be repaid, families were forced to sell their children into slavery. Going deeper into debt, they were unable to buy their children back. Jews were profiting from the misfortunes of other Jews.*

### OPENING

up to the Word

### DIGGING

into the Word

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### WINDOW

on the Word

## A Clear and Present Danger

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Nehemiah 6

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Has anyone ever spread lies about you to try to assassinate your character?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

**1.** What prompted Nehemiah's enemies to begin to target him personally (v. 1)?

**2.** When Sanballat and Geshem were unsuccessful in luring Nehemiah out of the safety of Jerusalem, what did they try next (vs. 5-7)?

**3.** How did Nehemiah handle the additional stress of personal danger in the midst of the great building project (v. 9)?

**4.** Since his enemies knew they couldn't change Nehemiah's mind, or stop him, what other tactic did they use to distract and intimidate him (vs. 12-14)?

**5.** How long did it take to complete the wall, and what was the effect on Nehemiah's enemies (vs. 15-16)?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

**1.** Are there people in your life who are actively hostile to you?

**2.** How are you responding to your enemies? How will God eventually and inevitably work within you and empower you to respond to them (Lk 6:27-35)?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

*"Should one like me go into the Temple?" (v. 11). Only priests were allowed into the sanctuary. Nehemiah's presence would have desecrated the Temple and brought judgment upon him. He placed obedience to God over his personal safety.*