

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

WEEK ONE: Nehemiah 1

Prayer

Devotional

Group Discussion

WEEK TWO: Nehemiah 2

Acting in Faith, Rallying People to Action

Devotional

Group Discussion

WEEK THREE: Nehemiah 3 & 4:15-23

Hard Work, Whatever It Takes

Devotional

Group Discussion

WEEK FOUR: Nehemiah 4:1-14 & 6

Dealing with Opposition & Conspiracy

Devotional

Group Discussion

WEEK FIVE: Nehemiah 5

Justice

Devotional

Discussion Guide

WEEK SIX: Nehemiah 5:14-19

Generosity

Devotional

Discussion Guide

WEEK SIX: Nehemiah 5:14-19

Generosity

Devotional

Discussion Guide

WEEK SEVEN: Nehemiah 8

Celebration

Devotional

Discussion Guide

WEEK EIGHT: Nehemiah 9:6-8

Calling, Covenant, Repentance, & God's Faithfulness:

Devotional

Discussion Guide

WEEK NINE: Nehemiah 1:11 & 9:16-36

Mission

Devotional

Discussion Guide

INTRODUCTION

Historical Setting

In 612 B.C. the prophecy of Nahum became a reality when the Chaldeans conquered Nineveh setting the stage for the Babylonian empire to take shape (Nahum 1:8-9). Daniel 1:1 records that in his first year as Babylon's king, Nebuchadnezzar launched a military strike against Jerusalem (597 B.C). The Jews were quickly overtaken but attempted a last ditch assault a year that resulted in further destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and city gates were destroyed by fire.

For 70 years the Jews lived in captivity both under Babylonian and later Persian rule. Up to 80,000 Jews were deported with the intention of assimilating their best and brightest into their own culture and the rest used for force labor. Foreign governors were put in place in Jerusalem to supervise the Jews that were left behind. In 549 B.C. Cyrus initiated the Persian Empire with quick victories over the Medes, Lydia and Iona and then Babylon in 539 B.C.

It is not completely clear what Cyrus's motive was but Ezra 1:1 records that he permitted those who had been taken to return home. Ezra picks up at this point and records the conflict that they experience early on from the foreign governors and those who did not want to see the Jews succeed in restoring their city. Nehemiah continues the story of restoration by inquiring on the work that Ezra has initiated only to be grieved that it is still in a disgraceful state. At this point Artaxerxes I has assumed power over the Roman Empire and Nehemiah has risen to the role of the kings Cup Bearer, the kings most trust official. 1

¹ Majority of research in this section was acquired from: Yamauchi, Edwin; Tomasino, Anthony; Cornelius, Izak (2016-01-12). Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)

Literary Setting²

The accounts of Ezra & Nehemiah were first read as one unit up until the third century when Origen first divided it into two separate books. Jerome followed suit and the Bomberg Bible maintained the same line of the thought in their 1525 translation. Whether read together or separate the book of Nehemiah is a historical narrative that chronicles not only what was built but also how it was built and the implications that followed.

This is evident throughout the text as we are introduced to various settings, plots, and characters that find themselves in various conflicts resulting in Nehemiah ascending as the clear hero of this narrative. "His character traits embody an ideal that we can admire and emulate. The story of his life embodies the conflicts and values of the community that produced him. He is both a leader and representative of his community."³

Literary Intentions

- Record historical facts the author chose to include.
- Use our imaginations to relive the events
- Draw our hearts and minds to the dramatic events that took place
- See ourselves as companions journeying with the hero we admire
- Give us a peek into what biblical community should look like
- Point us to the true hero, the Lord God, deserves worship and obedience.

Major Events in Nehemiah

- Nehemiah's secret nighttime inspections (2:13-16).
- Building of the city wall (weapon in one hand, tool in the other (4:17-18).
- Dramatic public reading of the Law (Ch. 8).
- Covenant renewal (Ch. 10).
- Pulling out the hair of Jews who married pagan wives (13:25).

² Majority of the research in this section was taken from: Literary Introductions to The Bible, Leland Ryken,

³ Literary Introductions to The Bible, Leland Ryken, 157

Tips for Reading Nehemiah

- Relive the story in your imagination.
- Look for meaning within the hero's development.
- Ask the question, "what does good society look like?"
- Location is important for application "the places God places us are important."
- Look for virtues to emulate and vices to repudiate: Leadership, following God, prayer, confession.
- As biblical source for understanding work.

General Outline	
1 - 6	Rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem
7	Return of a remnant of exiles
8 - 10	Renewal of the covenant
11 - 13	Further details of resettlement and reform

LITERARY OUTLINE					
Passage	Content	Storyline	Focus	Arena of Activity	Community Sphere
1:1-2:20	Planning for the rebuilding of the city wall	Rebuilding the wall	Work	The wall of Jerusalem	Civil Life of the Community
3:1-6:19	Rebuilding the wall amidst conflict without and within				
7:1-7:3	List of those who returned				
8:1-18	The Law read and explained	Reforming the people	Spiritual renewal and righteousness	God's Law	Religious Life of the community
9:1-10:39	Covenant renewal ceremony				
11:1-12:47	Resettling of Jerusalem				
13:1-31	Reforms of Nehemiah				

Theological Setting

While Ezra's narrative focuses on rebuilding the temple, Nehemiah points our attention to the reconstruction project of the city in which the temple exists. The temple and city was a reminder of God's presence with his people. When Israel lived as God's distinct and holy people they were blessed and flourished under God's protection. When they chose to ignore God's law and worship other gods they became susceptible to attack and were disciplined to remind them who they were and whom they belong to. Yet, even in those difficult times God love for his people never ends.

The primary agenda is to rebuild the wall and gates not only to demonstrate their strength to ward off possible attack but more importantly to remind the people who God is, a loving Father who protects his children. During the construction Nehemiah displays great character and leadership in dealing with opposition from various people. He is able identify quickly that the state of his city is a direct result of sin and not a poor military strategy. He is grieved and seeks the Lord with prayer and fasting knowing that it will only be through his favor and sovereign authority that anything can be done.

Nehemiah understands that the work will be empowered by God but through human hands. He demonstrates his faith in action by approaching Aterxerxes for support, setting out to examine the state of the city, and then commission workers to began rebuilding. Nehemiah's security in his calling by God to rebuild is challenged by opponents who use everything from threats, taunts, criticism, and violence to distract and disrupt the work. Nehemiah's dependency on the Lord to fight and protect his people motivates the workers to continue to rebuild while be on guard against possible attack.

Ultimately it is the people God wants to restore. Nehemiah brings god's word back into the city and reminds them of who God is and what he has done. The result is repentance and a recommitment to be devoted to God and live under his rule. Contrary to the beginning of the book the fasting and praying comes from a heart of joy and celebration. Even with Nehemiah faithfulness and leadership at the end the people are not completely free. The Lord requires holiness and Israel will never be able to meet that standard on their own. Later the Father will send a better Nehemiah in his Son Jesus who will be the perfect sacrifice and free God's people from sin and death.

He build his dwelling place in the hearts of men and eventually return for his people and place them in a new heaven and new earth for eternity.

Important Themes

- Devotion and obedience to God leads blessing and joy. Turning your back to God and worship idols leads to cursing and defeat.
- God requires dependence on him but sometimes uses humans to carry out his plan (Chapters 1 & 2).
- Trust in God shows itself in active obedience and not passive fear (4:9)
- We are to be servant leaders who are willing to surrender our rights for the benefit of others (5:9)
- God never breaks his covenant with his people even when his people break theirs.

WEEK ONE

PRAYER

NEHEMIAH 1 / DEVOTIONAL

*"Your Kingdom come your will be done..." **Matt. 6:10***

*As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. - **Nehemiah 1:4***

"Prayer is the primary way true faith expresses itself. This also means that prayerlessness is practical atheism, demonstrating a lack of belief in God." Michael Reeves"

What did Nehemiah hear that caused his heart to break? What did he hear that caused him to be in a constant state of weeping and mourning? What did he hear that cause him to pray and fast for 4 months? Did Nehemiah receive criticism on his cupbearer skills? Did he have conflict with someone from the exiled community because of a disagreement or missed expectation? Maybe He was disappointed in the direction his career was heading?

Any of these deserve reflection and a wise response yet this was not Nehemiah's issue. His people were coming to the end of their exile. They had no protection from further oppression and the temple where the living God dwells was vulnerable to further destruction. When was the last time you were grieved because God's will was ignored? When was the last time you wept for an injustice that was rampant in your city? When was the last time you fasted to seek intimacy with the Father because evil seemed to be destroying everything God called good?

When our desire is to please God regardless of your circumstance it takes the attention of you. It opens your eyes to his will and your purpose on planet earth. What causes God to be angry angers you and ignites in you a passion to see those things redeemed, healed, or removed. Anything that is a sweet aroma to him now brings you joy and you are delighted to pursue those things.

Your heart is what drives your passions, motives, and thoughts. Is God at the center? Can you pray sincerely "Thy Kingdom come thy will be done"?

WEEK ONE: PRAYER

PRAYER

Nehemiah 1 / Discussion Guide

Open your group with reading Psalm 86 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- **What does the current state of Jerusalem's wall and gates tell us about the state of the people (emotional, mental, spiritual)?**
- **When you read Nehemiah's prayer what does it reveal about what he believes about God?**

2. Evaluating

- **Why did Nehemiah feel compelled to confess not only his sins but Israel's past sins as well?**
- **Why would repentance be necessary for the work that lies ahead?**
- **When you read Nehemiah's prayer how are you convicted or encouraged regarding your own prayer life?**

3. Applying

- **What is going on in your ministry or group that you need to be dependent on God for through prayer?**
- **How will you faithfully act to address what is broken in your life or ministry?**

WEEK TWO

Acting Faith & Rallying People to Action

NEHEMIAH 2 / Devotional

“Then Elias the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They consecrated and set its doors, they consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hannel?”

Have you ever tried to do the work of God without an explicit calling, equipping, resourcing, and/or strengthening? If you answered yes it makes sense for Nehemiah first starts with the high priest. It demonstrates the all in approval of God through the commitment of his priests. Nehemiah is communicating that God is for this. He knows the work cannot and will not be successful without the high priest's approval and blessing because during this time it was the priests and prophets who spoke on God's behalf. Today we have such a high priest who not only speaks for God but also is God, Jesus Christ. He loves you dearly. He died and resurrected himself for you.

This means we can go to God at anytime, in any place, with whatever is on our heart and mind. When we are angry we can complain. When we are hurting we can cry out. In our joy we can sing and when we have no clue what to say we sit silently in his presence and the Holy Spirit will speak for us. In each encounter we can boldly go and continue the work we have been called to because we know we have a high priest who hears us, has approved our work, and has equipped us to do the work.

Has God approved the work you are doing? If so how are you using it to make much of Jesus?

For further study read 1 Samuel 13

WEEK TWO

Acting Faith & Rallying People to Action

NEHEMIAH 2 / Discussion Guide

1. Knowing & Understanding

- **What do we learn when we compare Nehemiah's approach and request of God in chapter 1 with how he approached and what he requested from the king?**
- **How does Nehemiah demonstrate his faith in God?**

2. Evaluating

- **How would you describe your attitude toward God today?**
- **How has that attitude impacted your faith in God?**

3. Applying

- **Any action not done out of faith is sin. What actions do you need to confess was done out of fear and not faith?**
- **What does the Gospel say about your fear?**

WEEK THREE

Hard Work, Whatever It Takes

Nehemiah 3; 4:15-24 / Devotional

Chapter three is the type of chapter we typically skip over. Hard to pronounce names, mundane repetition, little to no dialogue or dramatic encounters make it easy to convince ourselves the story will still maintain its coherence whether I read it or not. But it would be a mistake to skip it or choose not to pay as close attention as you would the other passages.

God uses Nehemiah 3 to teach us that we all have a part to play in fulfilling his redemptive plan here on planet earth. God united priests, entrepreneurs, stay at home moms, politicians, and both blue and white collar laborers to rebuild Jerusalem. The key word here is “united.” When we surrender to the authority of Jesus Christ and repent our sin he not only forgives us but also enlists us into the family business to help build a community of Jesus Christ look-alikes who are united and committed to using their gifts, talents, and treasures for the benefit of others while making much of Jesus.

If you are in Christ the Holy Spirit is working in you to conform you into the image of Christ, empowering you to join Jesus on mission, and equip you with grace and spiritual gifts to accomplish the task. The only thing is God saw fit to include a divine clause that states the work must be done through a body of people united in Christ and not single, independent, autonomous individuals. Regardless of your title, status, ethnicity you have been given gifts to be used in community to execute the Fathers good and perfect will.

What role has God given you to carry out for his glory?

For Further Study Read Ephesians 4

WEEK THREE

Hard Work, Whatever It Takes

Nehemiah 3; 4:15-24 / Discussion Guide

Open with reading Psalm 46 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- What does introducing the high priest first say about the importance of the work?
- What were your immediate thoughts when you read that nobles of the Tekoites refuse to "stoop to serve the Lord" (3:5)?
- When God frustrated the plans of their enemies what did that teach us about God and the work they were committed to?

2. Evaluating

- Why is it difficult to trust that God will fight for us?
- What does the Gospel teach us that makes trust in God both possible and necessary?
- How has Christ as our high priest empowered you to do the work he has called you to do (John 13:1-3)?

3. Applying

- What would be different in your life if you trusted God to fight for you instead of trusting yourself?

WEEK FOUR

Dealing With Opposition & Conspiracy

Nehemiah 4:1-14; 6 / Devotional

There's not a day that you won't need it; there's not a situation that won't demand it. What is it? The power of Jesus.

Paul Tripp

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."

Nehemiah 4:14

The smell of exile was still in their clothes. The possibility of captivity was a daily reality. Hope was constricted to the moment and would disappear with any thoughts of peaceful future. They could not see past their situation nor could they bring themselves to remember the blessings of the past. They were filled with anxiety. They doubted the mission and had thoughts of quitting. Ezra had tried and in their eyes failed why would Nehemiah be in different? If we give up now we will save our energy and possibly our lives.

This was the heart and mind of the people rebuilding the wall while facing opposition. Sound familiar? It should. It's what we all have come face-to-face with many times in our lives. Fear! Fear makes us forget. You forget who you are and whose you are. You forget the steadfast love of God and his all-satisfying joy. His unending supply of grace that he has unleashed on us in abundance. Fear makes us forget the Lord. Nehemiah could see the fear in his people's eyes. He knew that if he could not snap them out of a fear-driven trance it would put them back into the situation they were coming out of.

Are you leaving in fear? Has fear paralyzed you and is keeping you from completing the work ahead of you? Has fear stagnated your spiritual growth and made you apathetic to the will of God? Remember God who is gracious and faithful to keep his promises.

For further study, read Romans 8:31-39.

WEEK FOUR

Dealing With Opposition & Conspiracy

Nehemiah 4:1-14; 6 / Group Discussion

Open with reading Psalm 1 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- What would cause anyone to be enraged by the rebuilding of Jerusalem?
- What tactics does Nehemiah's enemies used to distract him from the work?
- What were the outcomes of the opposition to God's work?

2. Evaluating

- In what ways could you see opposition being a blessing (Acts 6)?
- Where are you currently experiencing opposition to what God has called you to?
- How did Jesus deal with distractions?
- How does the Gospel give us the strength to face opposition (Romans 8:28-32)?

3. Applying

- How has God used opposition to grow you spiritually?
- Knowing we can expect opposition when we follow God, what can we take away from this narrative that will better prepare us for opposition?

WEEK FIVE

Justice

Nehemiah 5:1-13 / Devotional

“Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Proverbs 31:9

Time and experience has taught us to keep our head down and avoid conflict or anything that could disrupt our normal flow of life. We love our routines and our comforts. We love our toys. We protect them at any cost. We don't want to do anything that may puts those things in danger. As a result, we've learned to keep our eyes shut and mouths closed. This includes fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves. Yet, this is what we have been called to do. Our faith demands we live in pursuit of justice in our city. It demands that we “open our mouths, judge righteously, and defend the poor and the needy.” Not because we have more, nor out of guilt or shame. Rather, simply because our identity is in Christ. Therefore, we joyful desire to be like Christ by dispersing the blessings of a generous king and upholding his will as his ambassadors on planet earth.

Are you willing to you use your hands and voice to defend those who cannot defend themselves?

For further study, read Isaiah 56:1-12

WEEK FIVE

Justice

Nehemiah 5:1-13 / Discussion Guide

Open with reading Psalm 18 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- Using a personal experience or your own words how would describe what is taking place in this passage? (You may need to re-read it out loud to the group.)
- Identify all of the ways people responded to the famine?

2. Evaluating

- What do you believe you are entitled to?
- What does God say you are entitled to?
- How does Jesus work on the cross change that outcome?

3. Applying

- Do we believe there is no injustice in our city that God cannot transform or resolve? Why or Why not?
- What injustice in our city can we cry out to God to for help?

WEEK SIX

Generosity

Nehemiah 5:14-19 / Devotional

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, and Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

Luke 19:8

Zacchaeus, although was short in stature, was a big deal in his city. He was a shrewd accountant who was filthy rich. He was not well liked but it didn't matter because he had a job to do, money to make and he was not going to let anyone get in his way. That meant even taking a family's last dime if he believed it was owed to him. He was literally the opposite of generous. But everything changed when he met Jesus. Everything!

There was no way he could go on being known as a notorious tax king pen filling his pockets with the people's money with no regard to the destruction his actions had caused. Because of his encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus's whole life changed. His heart became tender, his mind became less self-centered, and his work had purpose beyond making money. Most importantly he became generous. In his own words, "the half of my goods I give to the poor."

You will never meet a person who has had an encounter with the living God and come away the same. What God is teaching us is that our conversion into his family not only changes us but also frees us to unclench our grip and live generously.

Where do you see the effects of an encounter with Jesus in your life? Is one of them generosity?

WEEK SIX

Generosity

Nehemiah 5:14-19 / Discussion Guide

1. Knowing & Understanding

- **What was Nehemiah's motivation for surrendering his rights?**
- **If Nehemiah accepted what he was entitled to how would that have affected the work God was doing in Jerusalem?**

2. Evaluating

- **In what ways did Jesus surrender his rights on earth?**
- **How does your relationship with Jesus make surrendering your rights for the benefit of other's joyful and not burdensome or legalistic?**

3. Applying

- **What is God asking you to surrender to benefit of someone else? Before you answer reflect on:**
 - **Who Jesus is?**
 - **What he has done for you?**
 - **Who does Jesus says you are?**
 - **What resources has he given you?**

WEEK SEVEN

Celebration

Nehemiah 8 / Devotional

“Because they understood the words that was declared to them. The joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Nehemiah 8:10

Joy is an amazing feeling in our soul we get as a result of the working of the Holy Spirit in during and after regular encounters Jesus. Are you joyful? Not are you happy or excited or hopeful. Are joyful. Regardless of circumstances, setting, or people do you have joy? If you are not having regular encounters with Jesus the answer is no.

Joy without Jesus at the center is manure covered in whipped cream. It gives the allusion of tasty and the perception of fulfilling. Eventually we discover true joy was none of those things and we are left empty and discouraged. The people of Israel rediscovered their joy. It wasn't because of freedom or even in the comfort of having the wall restored. It was in the fresh all satisfying word of God. They read it, understood it, and had no other choice but to worship and celebrate. It is only through regular encounters with God through his word, prayer, and his people will we find true joy and true joy is where we will find our strength.

Where does your joy come from?

WEEK SEVEN

Celebration

Nehemiah 8 / Discussion Guide

Intro

1. Knowing & Understanding

- **The Feast of Booths was to remember the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan. How would reinstituting this feast add more value to the celebration?**
- **What similar characteristics did the people in exile share with their ancestors prior to rebuilding the Jerusalem?**

2. Evaluating

- **Why does God's faithfulness deserve celebration?**
- **What would your life look like without God's faithfulness?**
- **Who do you rely on to meet your needs? Give an example that would demonstrate this.**

3. Applying

- **Recently how has God demonstrated his faithfulness in your life (e.g. kept promises, answered prayer, restored relationships, etc.)?**
- **What are the outcomes when we forget God's faithfulness?**
- **How can we as a group develop a culture of celebration and remembrance of who God's faithfulness??**

WEEK EIGHT

Calling, Covenant, Repentance

Nehemiah 9:6-8/ Devotional

God's promises only go as far as his sovereign authority. His kingship and sweet royal promises go hand and hand. They are not separate ideas. They are a divine package gift wrapped with grace and freely given to those who have set aside their own kingdom of self and joyfully dwell under the rule of Jesus Christ. In other words God would not be able to keep his promises to you, Nehemiah or anyone else if he was not who he said he was. Each one of God's promises point to his divine attributes and put on display his glory to us for us to reflect back to the world. That's a sobering reality. Yes we a have covenant keeping God who is faithful. Not because he owes us but because He is who he said he is: The infinite all powerful, all knowing, God who is ever-present and sovereignly rules over all creation by executing his will according to his good purpose for all of eternity. This is the God we serve and we can have assurance that he will keep his promises.

For Further Study Read Job 38-41

WEEK EIGHT

Calling, Covenant, Repentance

Nehemiah 9:6-8/ Discussion Guide

Open with Psalm 78 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- How is God described in this passage?
- What were Israel's sins?

2. Evaluating

- What has happened to you that makes you certain that God can and will keep you in his family?
- How does knowing that change or affirm your understanding of sin and repentance?

3. Applying

- R

WEEK NINE

Mission

Nehemiah 1:11; 9:16-36 / Devotional

They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

Have you ever felt trapped and hopeless with no way out? At your lowest point you discover a way out. That is what the words “but God” are to the Christian. It is our way out. It is the Gospel. We were dead in our trespasses but God. He freed not because we deserved it but because he graciously fixed his love on us and determined for his namesake to set us free from the bondage of sin and death. “But God” are two of the most grace filled words that we can utter.

Take your time leading up to your group meeting to meditate on some of the verses below. I pray they bring you joy and awe in the God who loves us in spite of our sin:

Genesis 50:20

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Psalms 49:15

But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.

Psalms 73:26

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Isaiah 40:8

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

Matthew 19:26

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible..

Acts 3:15

You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WEEK NINE

Mission

Nehemiah 1:11; 9:16-36 / Discussion Guide

Open with Psalm 104 and prayer.

1. Knowing & Understanding

- How is God described in this passage?
- What were Israel's sins?

2. Evaluating

- What has happened to you that makes you certain that God can and will keep you in his family?
- How does knowing that change or affirm your understanding of sin and repentance?

3. Applying