

NEHEMIAH

return + rebuild



NEHEMIAH OVERVIEW

The book of Nehemiah tells the story of the return of God's people to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls. But this isn't just about physically returning to Jerusalem. This story is about returning to God and his ways – what the Bible calls repentance.

This is a story for all of us. It's a story about all of us. We all go through seasons of rebellion and ruin. And we all have the opportunity to return and rebuild, repent and restore.

Thankfully, we have a God who never gives up on rebellious people and offers means for us always to return to him and be made new. Israel was given the means to return and rebuild through foreign kings. We are given the means to return and rebuild through King Jesus.

To learn more about Nehemiah, watch this Bible Project video on Ezra-Nehemiah: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/ezra-nehemiah/>.

PART 1: REPENT AND RETURN

Read the text: Nehemiah 1:1-11

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.

Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning

Jerusalem. And they said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”

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. And I said, “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.’ They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

As Nehemiah receives the news of the ruined walls he is overcome with grief, not just because of the ruin, but because of he and the people's rebellion against God that caused the ruin. His appeal is to God's covenant love that never gives up which leads to his confidence to confess the sins of the people, Israel.

He can openly confess sin without reserve because he is confident in God's unfailing love. Nehemiah confesses as one who is also guilty. In his confession, he doesn't just recount their rebellion but God's promises to both scatter them if they rebel, but also to gather them back if they return to God (repent). Nehemiah ends his prayer with a plea for mercy from God and favor from the King. Nehemiah can pray with contrition and boldness, pleading for God's mercy because he knows God's Word which reveals God's character and promises. Likewise, our courage to confess is evidence of our knowledge of God's love.

Discussion Questions:

These questions are written for DNA groups, but you can use in any setting, including missional communities. Because they were written for the intimacy of DNA friendships, you may need to adjust for larger groups.

1. Pastor Jeff shared that it's possible for us to focus on "returning" without really "repenting." In the midst of our current crisis, are there ways you're longing for a "return" to normal but have neglected to pay attention to ways God may be calling you to repent? Have you stopped to pay attention to what work of repentance and transformation God is wanting to do in your life right now?
2. Nehemiah sat for four months in his feeling of sadness, longing for God to meet his need. Feelings are an amazing gift from God! They alert us to reality. They wake us up to the world around and to the world inside of us, showing us our needs and desires, leading us to go to God to meet our needs. What do you do with your feelings? Do you tend to ignore your feelings, numb them through distraction, or become consumed by them. Or, do you acknowledge them and see your very real need, going to God to meet your need?
3. What ruins (brokenness or sin) is God calling you to sit in and feel right now? Have you sat long enough in the ruins to feel the

sadness? To realize your hunger? To hear and receive from God?

4. When you think about repenting and returning to God, what you believe about God will shape how you pray. Some of us may view our heavenly Father through the lens of a broken, earthly father. This affects how we think God is going to respond to our repentance. What truths about the Father do you need to remember as you return and repent? Do you know and trust enough in God's faithful love for you to openly confess your sin and turn back to him?