

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 a means for us 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 10: SET APART FOR JOY

Read the text: Nehemiah 11:1-2; 12:27-31a, 43

Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem. And the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city, while nine out of ten^[a] remained in the other towns. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem.

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

In order to rebuild the city, God set apart one-tenth of the people to move into Jerusalem and join the leaders on this mission. Their end goal is not just to rebuild the city, but a recommitment to establish Jerusalem as “the Holy City”, as a light to the nations around them. After purifying themselves, the people, the walls, and the gates; the Levites and priests lead the people in a city-wide time of thanksgiving and worship. They are filled with joy as they set themselves and their city apart to once again be God’s dwelling place. And their joy is heard from far away. In this dedication celebration, they begin to fulfill the mission God had called them to; to be a holy people filled with joy who display His goodness and glory to the nations around them.

As Peter writes (1 Peter 2:9), we, the church, are now called God’s holy people because of the work of Jesus. We have been set apart to be His dwelling place and to display Him to our watching world. As we embrace this set-apart identity, we can be

filled with joy because we know God is with us. And our joy displays the goodness of God to our neighbors.

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. Take a minute to pause and imagine the face of God beaming down at you as His beloved child. How does that make you feel? Do you think He really is beaming down on you and rejoicing over you?
2. Have you experienced real joy because you know God is with you? Can you share a time when you felt tangible joy and peace, knowing your Father was with you?
3. What is God calling you to that may seem hard or difficult? Will you let Him take you by the hand and lead you, trusting that He can fulfill the deepest desires of your heart?
4. If you are indeed God's holy dwelling place, what would it look like for every area of your life to be set apart for His presence? Your time, your marriage, your friendships, your body, you sexuality, your money? What specifically do you want to set apart for God?
5. Do your neighbors have tangible opportunities to see and hear your joy?

Close your time together praying this prayer by Henri Nouwen:

Dear God,

I so much want to be in control.

I want to be the master of my own destiny.

Still I know that you are saying:

“Let me take you by the hand and lead you.

Accept my love

and trust that where I will bring you,

the deepest desires of your heart will be fulfilled.”

Lord, open my hands to receive your gift of love.

Amen