

# 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 11: REBELLION AND REFORM

Read the text: Nehemiah 13:4-14

Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the

contributions for the priests. While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Nehemiah ends in Chapter 13. And it isn't happy. It's quite depressing. In Chapter 10, the people recommitted themselves to God. In Chapter 11 and 12 they dedicate the walls and their joy spreads beyond the city. But, in Chapter 13, after Nehemiah heads back to serve the king of Babylon, the people in Jerusalem return to their old broken and evil ways. They break the covenant they made just a few years before.

In the absence of spiritual leadership, they experienced spiritual atrophy and apathy. We see them rebel against God in four main areas: desecrating the house of God, refusing to give to support God's work, refusing to rest, and becoming unequally yoked in marriages with those who don't follow God. In the end, Nehemiah, exasperated and angry, tries to bring about some kind of reform, but is left feeling like it's not enough. This bitter ending points us towards their need, and our need, for a better King and a better builder who would be able to bring true reform to our lives, starting with our own broken hearts.

### **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. They had the physical temple, but Jesus tells us that we are now the temple of the living God. How might your temple need to be cleared out or cleansed today? What might you need to remove to make space for you to be present with God? What needs cleansing in your heart?
2. One of the signs of spiritual apathy and atrophy is a lack of generosity. Are you generous with your time, your resources, your money? OR Are you feeling empty, worn out and in need of God's filling so that you have something to give?
3. Refusal to rest was the epitome of their rebellion; it was a slap in the face of God and a refusal to truly trust Him to provide. Are there ways you are currently refusing to rest and instead striving, not sure you can really trust God? What does that look like for you right now? Maybe it centers around financial provision, a job, a future spouse, children, friends, the ability of the church to gather? How are you striving?

4. They also became unequally yoked in their marriages with those who did not walk in the way of God. Are there ways you have become unequally yoked? Maybe in a close relationship, partnership, or even in a loyalty to a political party or movement? What would it look like to return and yoke yourself to Jesus as King? (*Note: If possible, God calls believers to stay committed to unequally-yoked marriages with the hope that the unbelieving spouse will see the Gospel through their spouse. See 1 Cor. 7:12-16*)
  
5. If your heart, or temple, needs cleansed or reordered, your ultimate hope must be in Jesus, the better King, who is the only One able to bring true cleansing and true order. Your story will end in frustration, just like Nehemiah, if you seek this on your own apart from Jesus. What next steps might God be calling you to so that Jesus can write a better ending to your story?