

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 7: REBUILDING LIFE

Read the text: Nehemiah 8:1-18 (only vs. 1-12 included below)

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it

facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

After the wall has been rebuilt, the Jews now begin to look at rebuilding their own lives. Significantly, the first step they take is to invite Ezra to read the law for half the day while the Levites help to make sure they understand it. They want to rebuild life on the Word of God. As they hear God's Word, they weep; seeing clearly the ruins around them and the way both their father's sin and their own sin had brought pain and hurt to their life. However, the leaders call them to rejoice, because "God's joy over them is their stronghold." They are invited to celebrate because God rejoices over them. They are then sent home to celebrate God's love.

Before we try to rebuild our lives in the ruins of COVID and 2020, we have the opportunity to stop and seek to let our lives be built on the foundation of God's good Word for us! As we do this, it will bring sorrow. When we're honest about the ruin around us, the pain and hurt we all feel because of others' sin and our own sin, it leads to weeping. Yet, God comforts those who mourn and will rejoice over us. Knowing how the Father feels about us, we're freed to celebrate in the midst of the ruins.

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. 2020 has dismantled our lives in many ways and exposed our shaky foundations? What are the shifting foundations you've built your life on that have been exposed this year?
2. God is inviting you to stop trying to get past COVID and to build your life on the foundation of His good Word for you. What would that tangibly look like for you to seek God's Word for you and make it the foundation of your life? What tangible steps is God calling you to take?

3. Being honest about the ruin in our lives will bring sorrow. When we face the hurt we've experienced because of other's sin, or our own sin, it is painful. Have you faced the pain and ruin in your own story? If so, how did God meet you in that moment? How do you think He felt about you then? If you haven't, why do you think you avoided it?
4. Have you received the Father's love for you? Do you really believe that He likes you, delights in you, and rejoices over you? Do you find yourself thinking you need still to earn God's love or prove yourself worthy? What does that look like? Can you share a specific moment with your group when you truly felt secure in God's love for you?
5. Where is God bringing conviction, comfort, or clarity to you right now? Is He calling you to do anything in light of that? Take time to pray for each other and discuss how you can support each other in this.