

INTRODUCTION

Title: The title of Nehemiah derives from the central figure of the narrative.

Author: The author of Ezra probably wrote Nehemiah. The book contains personal records of Nehemiah, but he probably did not author the entire work. Some scholars believe that this same anonymous author also recorded 1-2 Chronicles. Though we do not formally know who authored the work, we can be confident that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Date: The events in this book occur over a period of around 20 years, from 445-423 B.C.

Theme: The theme of Nehemiah is the LORD's providential protection of His people and the expected response of obedience and faithfulness in prayer and praise.

MESSAGE

Nehemiah functions as a sequel to the events described in Ezra. The book is an account of God's faithfulness to His promises and thus foreshadows the gospel reality of a merciful and gracious God who provides for His people even in the midst of their infidelity.

The book opens with a group of exiles from Babylon who return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall around the city. Though the people are hard pressed by opposition, the Lord strengthens His people for His work, and they are able to rebuild the wall. From there, the narrative describes the recommitment of the people to the provisions of God's covenant.

There are a variety of complementary ways to read Nehemiah. The title character himself provides helpful snapshots into the affections and integrity of a leader, and the book overviews an important development in the history of God's redemptive plan. These are helpful ways to read the book and provide beneficial insight for our edification, but they are not ultimate.

Nehemiah is ultimately about the promises, providence, provision and protection of the LORD, as well as the prayers of His people. As we read the book, we see the faithfulness of our God and His steadfast love toward His own, a love that eventually and fully manifests in the giving of His Son to be the better temple and to establish the better city prepared for those who love Him and joyfully submit to His good rule.

As you read Nehemiah and work through this study, take special note of a few theological themes:

1. The returning from exile as a "second" Exodus experience.
2. The temple and city of Jerusalem for the people.
3. The Scripture as central to the community's identity and worship.
4. The prayer and praise as the natural responses of the people of the LORD.
5. The providence and protection of the LORD.

TIMELINE

*While some dates are certain, others are approximated based upon contextual evidence.
All dates are B.C.*

722-721	Northern Kingdom exiled Isaiah prophecies Micah prophecies Jeremiah prophecies
605	First deportation of the Southern Kingdom
597	Second deportation of the Southern Kingdom
586	Third and final deportation of the Southern Kingdom (Solomon's temple destroyed) Ezekiel prophecies
538	Cyrus issues a decree for the rebuilding of the temple First return from exile
520	Haggai prophecies
520-515	Zechariah prophecies
516	The rebuilding of the temple is completed
483-465	The events of Esther's narrative unfold
458	Second return of the people led by Ezra Malachi prophecies
444	Third return of the people led by Nehemiah
426	Nehemiah's second return and final reforms of the people
331	The Persians are supplanted by the Greeks under Alexander's rule
164	Maccabean rebellion
63	Palestine submits to Roman rule

SESSION 1

INTERCESSION

NEHEMIAH 1 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Moses, descending from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the Law, takes in a terrible sight: the chosen people of God in revelry and worship around a golden calf of their own making. His response? The words of Deuteronomy 9 tell us the story:

Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger...And I prayed to the LORD, 'O Lord GOD, do not destroy your people and your heritage, whom you have redeemed through your greatness, whom you have brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Do not regard the stubbornness of this people, or their wickedness or their sin...For they are your people and your heritage, whom you brought out by your great power and by your outstretched arm.' Deuteronomy 9:18, 26-29

Standing in the breach for his people, Moses pleads with God to fulfill His promise to bring his people to the land of their inheritance. And the Lord hears his plea.

A thousand years later, in the wake of another great disobedience, another righteous leader prostrates himself on behalf of this broken and disobedient people, offering a plea for their restoration. His name is Nehemiah. Dwelling in exile as the cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah learns of an inheritance in ruins, and his heart breaks with the news. His response is as astonishing as it is instructive.

READ NEHEMIAH 1 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. What is the purpose of the opening verses? What important details are we given?
2. Who brings news to Nehemiah about the state of Jerusalem? What news do these men give to Nehemiah?
3. How does Nehemiah respond to the news (1:4)?
4. What does Nehemiah's grief over the state of Jerusalem reveal about his character? His affection for the Lord? His affection for his people?
5. In his great distress, Nehemiah approaches God with an orderly appeal. What do you notice about the structure and content of the prayer (1:5-11)? Next to each heading below, note the corresponding verse:

Adoration

Opening Petition

Confession (corporate)

Confession (personal)

Petition (corporate)

Petition (personal)

6. When you are deeply sad or frustrated over a difficult situation, how do you begin your prayers to the Lord? How is the opening to Nehemiah's prayer an example to you?
7. What petition does Nehemiah repeat like a bookend to his prayer (1:6, 11)? What do you think this repetition should communicate to us? To God?
8. After calling God "the great and awesome God who keeps covenant...with those who love him," Nehemiah reminds God of His covenant promise. What, specifically, does Nehemiah want God to do for His chosen people (1:9b)?
9. What does Nehemiah want God to do on his own behalf, with regard to the Persian king he serves (1:11b)?
10. In the first 11 verses of this book, what have Nehemiah's actions and words illustrated about his character? List some character traits below. Which ones do you wish described you more?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray through the beautiful prayer in Nehemiah 1. What elements of Nehemiah's prayer do you need to employ more faithfully? To close your time, write a prayer that models his.

SESSION 2

RETURN

NEHEMIAH 2 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Four months pass since Nehemiah hears of his people's ruined inheritance and makes his appeal to the Lord. Though his life as the king's cupbearer proceeds as normal, his burden for the "city of his father's graves" increases.

As the royal cupbearer, a person of rank and influence, Nehemiah acts as a bodyguard and adviser to the king. It is his job to taste the king's food to be certain that it is safe to eat. He is also expected to maintain a pleasant countenance at all times in the presence of the king. To show sadness or any other negative emotion risks suspicion of displeasure and disloyalty from the king, a dangerous thing. For months, Nehemiah keeps up the appearance of contentment, but finally his composure breaks. Knowing that the moment he has prayed for is upon him, he boldly makes his request of the king.

READ NEHEMIAH 2 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. What can we learn about Nehemiah from the fact that he rose to the role of cupbearer in the court of a foreign king?
2. How do you think Nehemiah spent the four months between learning of Jerusalem's ruin and making his request of the king? How does the text support your thinking?
3. What is Nehemiah's response when the king notices his sadness (2:2b)?

Is his answer direct or evasive (2:3)? How might you have been tempted to answer?

4. What does Nehemiah ask of the king? Summarize his requests and objectives below:

Verse	Request	Objective
2:5		
2:6		
2:7		

5. To what does Nehemiah attribute the success of his petitions (2:8b)?

Think of a time when you risked rejection or failure to pursue the will of the Lord. How did the good hand of God grant you favor?

6. With a well-provisioned, well-armed group of fellow travelers, Nehemiah makes the 800-mile journey to Jerusalem. Assuming a conservative travel rate of 10 miles a day, approximately how many months did the trip take?
7. Summarize Nehemiah's activities and observations in 2:11-16.
8. How would you explain the timing and purpose of Nehemiah's inspection (2:12)?
9. Upon completing his inspection, what challenge does Nehemiah give to the people? How do the people respond (2:17-18)?
10. How do the regional governing officials react (2:19)? Does Nehemiah's response to them address their questions or their motives? Explain.
11. By the end of this chapter, we have been introduced to three opponents to Nehemiah's vision:
 - Sanballat the Horonite governed Samaria, to the north of Judah.
 - Tobiah the Ammonite governed Ammon, to the east of Judah.
 - Geshem the Arab governed the area south of Judah.

In chapter 4 a fourth opponent will be introduced: the Ashdodites, who dwelt to the west of Judah. What does Nehemiah want us to understand about the nature and degree of the opposition he faces?

12. In chapter 2 we see Nehemiah's boldness. Are you bold like Nehemiah? What relationship or situation needs you to be bolder?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You are the King of Kings. To be the recipient of Your favor is an unspeakable gift. Thank You for the example of Your servant Nehemiah. As You did for him, instruct my heart to deeper prayerfulness, greater longing for Your kingdom to be established and less regard for my own personal comfort. Bless those in leadership over me. Strengthen my hands for the work You would have me to do. Amen.

SESSION 3

SYSTEMATIC WORK

NEHEMIAH 3 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

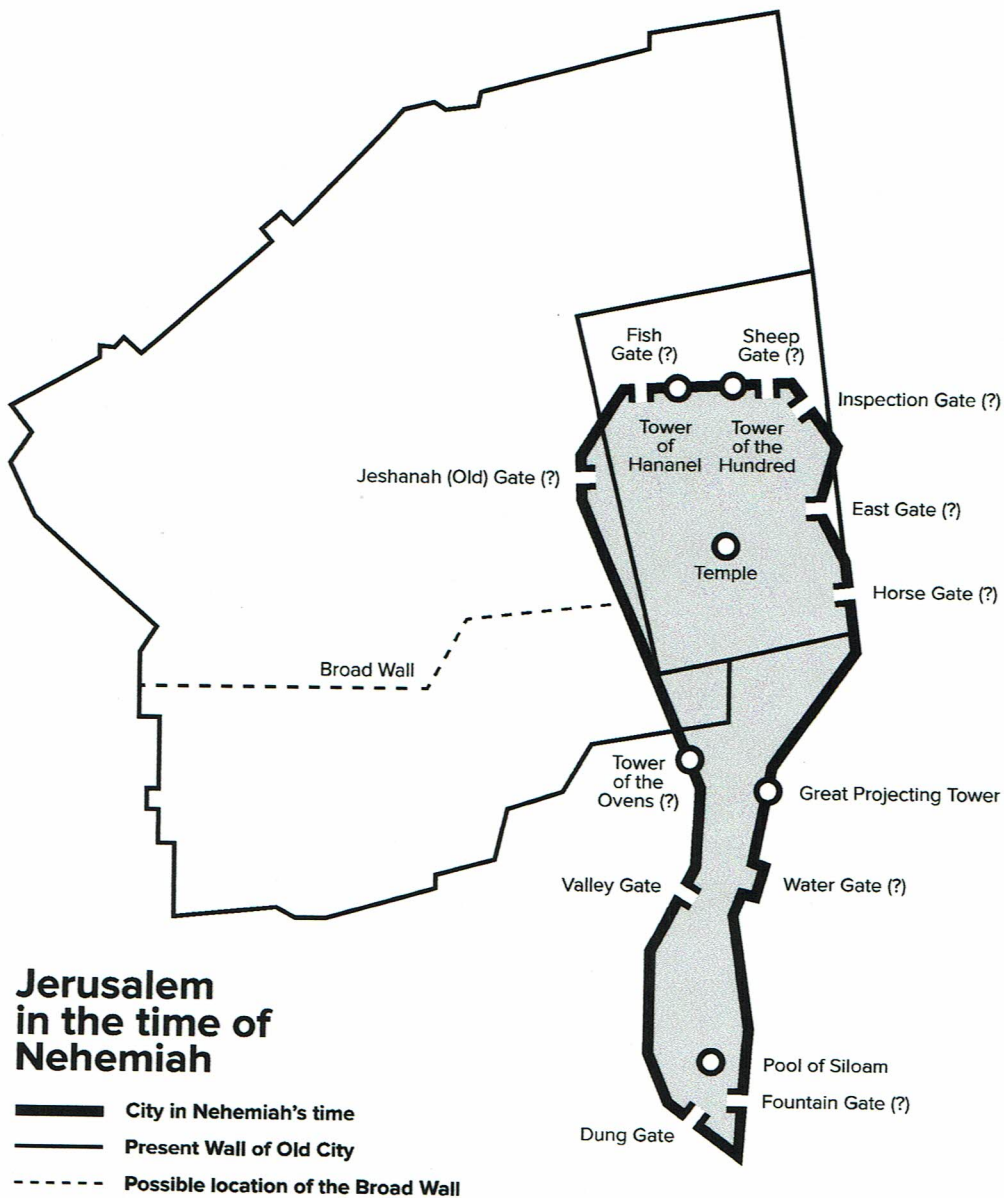
Nehemiah is a book about building. After learning about the scope of the problem and the potential for opposition, we at last come to the moment where the workers assemble and the good work begins.

During the darkest hours of World War II, Winston Churchill issued a now-famous call to the British people to rise up in the face of great opposition. He laid before them the bleakness of their situation and issued a call to unity and great effort, exhorting them to action with the pronouncement, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

Nehemiah, after surveying the rubble of Jerusalem's walls, issues a similar call to his people: "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." He gives no promise of fame or prosperity, no special accommodations for the wealthy or the powerful, just a call for all to come and build. And build they do, placing themselves along the walls and working steadily to restore the good name of their God.

READ NEHEMIAH 3 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. Nehemiah lists the names of those who helped rebuild the city wall. Below is a map of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah. On the map, number each location in the order it is mentioned. What do you learn about Nehemiah's system for recording the work?



2. Nehemiah details interesting facts about those who built the wall. Skim through the chapter and note which of the following types of people helped build:

- Goldsmiths
- Priests
- Homeowners
- Local residents
- Perfumers
- Rulers
- Daughters
- Out-of-towners
- Merchants
- Levites
- Sons

3. What conclusion can you draw from the varied nature of the builders with regard to:

- Nehemiah's recruitment skills?
- His leadership skills?
- The dedication of the people?
- The favor of God?

4. Is everyone in the area eager to help with the building? Who refrains from joining the project (3:5)?

What is their motive for not participating?

Nehemiah could have left out this detail. Why does he include it?

5. What idea is repeated in vv. 1, 3, 6, 13, 14 and 15? How many gates stood without any type of door or lock? Look back at your map. How many gates total did Jerusalem have? What practical problems do you think this presented for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the keepers of the recently rebuilt temple?

6. Take a few minutes to read and reflect on Psalm 62. How does this psalm expand on the picture of God's faithfulness in the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem?

7. Nehemiah shows great attention to the contributions of specific people in chapter 3. Whom do you receive help from who would be blessed by your recognition of their efforts?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, You are our strong fortress, our tower, our refuge. It pleases You to involve us in the work of Your kingdom. May we be quick to respond to the call to build. May we build humbly and willingly at our appointed place. May our voices not be raised among the opposition. May they not be lifted among the proud. May they be joined with those of the saints of all ages who have boldly proclaimed, "Let us rise up and build." Amen.

SESSION 4

OPPOSITION

NEHEMIAH 4 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

The people have a mind to work. They take to the rubble together and begin to sort, sweat and build until the work is halfway done. The wall will be rebuilt, and they will do it.

Little Israel, picked on and bullied by the nations – everyone hears the name-calling, the harsh taunts. Israel's enemies speak with sideways glances just in ear shot of someone who tells someone else, with each retelling tearing at the seams of Israel's confidence.

Soon the people grow weary, and their progress slows: "By ourselves we will not be able to rebuild the wall." The people no longer have a mind to work. Instead, they have a mind to fear, building with their doubts and framing walls of worry. "We will never finish at this rate," they tell themselves. "It is too much," they say. "We can't keep building; we have to defend ourselves now. Please, help us!"

Nehemiah watches Israel's strength fail and hears their fearful cries. "Do not be afraid of them!" he says. "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your homes!"

And with the fear of the Lord, every man returns to his work, each stone a stitch repairing the true confidence of Israel. The people have a mind to remember the Lord.

READ NEHEMIAH 4 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. Summarize the events in chapter 4 into three sections. List a key theme of each section below:
 - (vv. 1-9)
 - (vv. 10-14)
 - (vv. 15-23)
2. Sanballat and Tobiah criticize and mock the Israelites. Why are they unhappy about the rebuilding of the wall? What do they hope to accomplish with their criticism?
3. Nehemiah responds to their criticism with a strongly worded prayer in 4:4-5. What do you think of his prayer? Does it seem harsh? Why or why not?
4. Think of a time when someone criticized you for doing good. How did you respond? Did you respond like Nehemiah, with righteous words directed toward God? Did you respond with angry words directed toward your attacker? Did you respond with self-justifying words directed toward your supporters? What does our response toward criticism reveal about our fears?
5. When Sanballat and Tobiah begin plotting an attack, what two actions do the builders take in response (4:9)? Why are both important?
6. The Israelites in the surrounding areas hear rumors of attack when the wall is only halfway done. They come in from the field and beg for help. What do we learn about the confidence of the Israelites? How would you characterize their state of mind (4:10-12)?

7. Nehemiah gives three commands to the people in 4:14. What are they? Why does he give these three specific commands?
8. What kind of a work environment does Nehemiah describe in 4:21-23?

How is the Christian life similar to what Nehemiah describes? In what ways do we build the kingdom with a shovel in one hand and a sword in the other?

9. How might you act as a type of Nehemiah to your church and your family, leading them away from the fear of opposition and into a reliance on God?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You are faithful and gracious, and Your presence will soothe all of my fears if only I trust You more fully. Show me the roots of my unbelief and grant me repentance. Help me to recall Your gracious provision in the gospel. Help me to say with Nehemiah, "My God will fight for me." Thank You for Christ who perfectly demonstrated reliance on You. Bless me with a great passion for You and Your kingdom. Amen.

SESSION 5

OPPRESSION AND GENEROSITY

NEHEMIAH 5 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah has his hands full. The Hebrews are scared from the threat of an outside attack, while internal issues boil between them. The complaints to Nehemiah come from three different groups of people whose men left their day jobs to build the wall.

In an agrarian society, this means the wives and children stayed home to do the work in the field, and the men lost the fruit of their labor. This sacrifice cost their families, and they were forced to mortgage their land, put their children into debt slavery and ask for help with basic food. The interest on their debt was high, and either they couldn't pay or they had mortgaged all just to survive.

The issue was that those who were charging the interest, the ones foreclosing on debts and taking fields and vineyards away from the Hebrews, were other Hebrews. The upper class of the nation was forcing their own countrymen to sell their children into debt slavery, and they were selling Hebrews to Gentiles for a profit.

*Now our flesh is the flesh of our brothers, our children as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves...but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards. **Nehemiah 5:5***

Nehemiah doesn't mince words about his feelings in response, but he also doesn't respond immediately out of an emotional reaction. He considers the issue and takes time to think it through. There is no hasty email with choppy sentences shot off to the city councilman or the business bureau; he takes counsel with himself and then calls a meeting.

READ NEHEMIAH 5 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. In your own words, rewrite the outcry of the people in 5:1-5.
2. What do you think motivated the upper class to charge such high interest on the loans to their countrymen?
3. Nehemiah responds to the situation with anger and carefully chosen words. Summarize what he says to the nobles and officials in response to their actions. What reasons does he give to point out their error (5:6-13)?
4. How quickly do you turn anger into speech? Why is there wisdom in waiting to speak? Look up the following verses and note what they add to your understanding:
 - Proverbs 14:29
 - Ecclesiastes 7:9
 - James 1:19
5. In 5:14-19 we learn that Nehemiah does more than just make convincing arguments – he is also extremely generous. Summarize how his actions back up his words to the nobles and officials.
6. Compare 5:9 and 5:15. What common reason is given for being obedient to God? What do you think it means to obey God for this reason? What does it not mean?

7. We often let what others think of us dictate our decisions, allowing our fear of man to control our thoughts and actions. Do you tend to base your decisions on fear of God or fear of man? How does fear of man negatively affect the way you spend your time?
8. Nehemiah's fear of God prompts him to great generosity. How does our fear of man limit our ability to be generous to others?
9. To whom can you be generous this week with the gifts of time, money or possessions God has given you? Whom has God placed in your path who needs your generosity?

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious Father, You are slow to anger. Your decrees are upright. Teach me to learn self-control in dealing with my anger and words that I might better reflect Your character. You are a generous God, giving to those who do not deserve Your grace. Teach me to be open-handed with the things You have entrusted to me. Help me to see the needs of others before my own. Thank You that You are a God worthy of our reverent obedience. Amen.

SESSION 6

CONSPIRACY, COMPLETION AND RECORD KEEPING

NEHEMIAH 6-7 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

With order restored among the Hebrews, Nehemiah's attention turns once again to the completion of the wall. The wall is virtually complete, but there will be a final effort on the opposition's part to halt it by harming, intimidating and discrediting Nehemiah.

Nehemiah's character is tested to its utmost on the eve of this great accomplishment for God – not once, but three times. A man less concerned with God's opinion may have given in to the desires of those around him, those who opposed the work. Opposition to our character is often a test far greater than any physical or academic challenge, especially when our enemies attempt to deceive and derail us by intrigue and seemingly good proposals. But Nehemiah's singleness of purpose and loyalty to God alone serve as a shield for him in this final showdown.

As the main conflict resolves, God compels Nehemiah to register the people in a clear and orderly manner. The purpose is to repopulate Jerusalem.

READ NEHEMIAH 6-7 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. As the rebuilding project nears completion, what final threats does Nehemiah face from Sanballat, Tobiah and their cohorts?
2. What does the proposed meeting claim to be (6:7)? Why does Nehemiah suspect otherwise?
3. Even if the meeting were sincere or well-intentioned, how does Nehemiah not let the "good" distract him from the "better"? What better purpose keeps him from accepting the invitation to meet?
4. Why does Sanballat send an "open letter" instead of a sealed letter? (6:5-7) What impact is the unsealed letter intended to have on the public at large? On the ruling of the Persian king? What is Nehemiah's response?
5. What is the prophecy of Shemaiah intended to do? How does Nehemiah discern that Shemaiah is a false prophet? Note: Only priests can enter the sanctuary at this time (Num. 18:7).
6. Jerusalem's walls lay in neglect for over a century and a half. Amazingly, Nehemiah completes the job in just two months. Look back at 6:15-16. How does Nehemiah's matter-of-fact report of the wall's completion shed light on the kind of man he is?

7. Why does Nehemiah list the returned exiles?

How should the fact that the Bible lists people by name reassure you? Look up Luke 10:20 to help with your answer.

8. Whom does God use to contribute to the rebuilding (7:70-72)? What does this say about each person's role in God's plan?
9. In chapters 6 and 7, Nehemiah demonstrates wisdom and humility. What areas of your life would benefit from exercising more of these two things?

CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, Your name is holy. Forgive us for the times that we have wilted under pressure rather than clinging in truth to You. Thank You for forgiveness and Your gracious preservation in the midst of trials and difficulties. Thank You for the example of Nehemiah's wisdom and humility. Thank You for Your Son who modeled these perfectly. Keep us in Your love and strengthen us to walk in faithful obedience to You. In Christ's name and for His sake. Amen.

SESSION 7

READING OF THE WORD AND RESPONSE

NEHEMIAH 8-9 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 8-9 describes a remarkable revival in the life of Israel. With the wall completed, Nehemiah leads the people to respond to God's Word as read by Ezra. As the people gather together to hear the Law read aloud from daybreak to noon, the Scripture tells us they all "could understand what was being read." And the Holy Spirit leads them to respond powerfully and repent as a community. For seven days, the reading continues as godly leaders turn God's people to His Word.

The public reading of God's own words leads the people to celebrate their God and to turn their attention to confession of sin and repentance. They praise Him by recalling His mighty works in their history and giving glory to God: "In all that has happened to us, you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong" (Neh. 9:33).

READ NEHEMIAH 8-9 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. What is the occasion for assembling the people on the first day of the seventh month (see also Lev. 23:23-25 and Num. 29:1-6)?
2. Why do the people assemble in the public square instead of the temple?
3. Ezra came to Jerusalem 13 years prior to teach the Law (Ezra 7:6-10). Why does it take so long for this general assembly to gather and hear him proclaim the truth of God's Law? What changes have made this assembly possible?
4. What is the makeup of this historic gathering of people? Who is helping these people understand the Scriptures clearly (8:2,7,9)?
5. What happens when the people truly understand God's Word? (8:9-11) Why do they respond in this way?
6. Look up 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. Based on this passage, what evidence do you find in Nehemiah 8-9 that genuine repentance is occurring?
7. Who is involved in the second day's reading (8:13)? What do these people discover and do?

8. Look up Leviticus 23:23-43 and note what the Feast of Booths was intended to help the Israelites remember. Having just completed the building of a permanent structure (Jerusalem's wall), how would living in an impermanent structure for a week remind the people of God's faithfulness?
9. In chapter 9 the people respond to what they have heard and learned with a time of corporate confession. In the recorded prayer, God's grace and power are reviewed throughout redemptive history. What key events are recorded? How are both the justice and mercy of God shown working in and through them (9:6-31)? What do the Israelites recognize and ask in light of the faithfulness of God (9:32-37)? What do the Israelites commit to do (9:38)?
10. Think back through your own history with God. What key times can you point to as evidence of His goodness? In light of His past faithfulness, what present difficulty can you entrust to Him?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I bless You for the beauty of Your Word. Your Word is good and right and pure. It is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Sanctify me by Your Word that I might more fully reflect Your great glory among the nations. I pray this through Your Son and by Your Spirit. Amen.

SESSION 8

NAMES AND OBLIGATIONS

NEHEMIAH 10 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are an Israelite during the time of Nehemiah. You have just spent almost two months building the walls of Jerusalem under constant fear of attack from your enemies. You are hot, sweaty, tired and afraid. Your sword has rubbed the outside of your leg raw because you have had to wear it in case you get attacked while working. Although God has been gracious to you and your people by delivering you out of slavery in Egypt, giving you your own land and choosing you to be His people, you know that the reason you were recently exiled into both Assyria and Babylon was due to the fact that you and your people rejected God by disobeying His commands.

You now hear God's law read aloud and repent. God has given you a second chance. How will you do things differently moving forward?

READ NEHEMIAH 10 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. Though many people are listed in the opening verses of chapter 10, to what groups do these people belong? Note: Nehemiah is called the governor, and there are three other specific categories.
2. What is significant about the leaders making an oath to be obedient? Why is godly leadership important?
3. In addition to the leaders, who else takes the oath to obey God's commands (10:28-29)?
4. Why should repentance and obedience be corporate acts as well as individual acts? Why are both corporate and individual repentance and obedience necessary and good?
5. What do the people commit to do with regard to:
 - Marriage (10:30)?
 - How they spend their time (10:31)?
 - How they spend their money (10:32-39)?
6. Why is it important for the Israelites not to intermarry with pagans (Exod. 34:12-16; Deut. 7:1-4)?

7. Why is the observation of a Sabbath rest important to observe faithfully (Deut. 5:12-15)?
8. What phrase is repeated in Nehemiah 10:32-39 to emphasize why the Israelites are committing to give their finances? Why is this phrase significant in light of the fact that it was torn down during the exile?
9. The Israelites turn repentance into action by committing to change the way they handle relationships, time and money. Which of these areas in your life needs to be impacted by repentance and change? Note a specific change you can make in each area.
10. What final thought closes out the covenant at the end of chapter 10? The neglect of God's house brings ridicule upon the Jews. Rewrite this statement as a positive commitment. What is the implied "we will"? What can you do personally to fulfill this "we will" statement?

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I so often neglect the house of my God by spending my energies on my own concerns and by acting in ways that discredit Your grace. I confess my sin to You and ask You to alter how I treat my relationships, my time and my resources. Use them for Your glory so that Your house and Name might be great among the people of the earth.

SESSION 9

LEADERS, DEDICATION AND SERVICE

NEHEMIAH 11-12 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

God promises the Israelites that they will be His people and that He will be their God. He promises them the land of the Canaanites as their possession. He promises that they will rule and that His glory will stretch through them to the ends of the earth. But then they are exiled – no land, no temple, no home. Does God forsake His promises? Does He forget about His people?

Then, by His grace, God allows His people to return to Israel and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. God remains faithful. As a response to His goodness, the people celebrate and worship with great joy: “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” (Neh.12:43).

READ NEHEMIAH 11-12 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. The people commit to bring tithes (one tenth) of their income to the house of the Lord (10:38). What kind of tithe do they commit to in 11:1-2?
2. Why is the repopulation of Jerusalem a logical next step in fulfilling the promise of 10:39 that "We will not neglect the house of our God."?
3. Though lots are cast to select them, the leaders go willingly to live in Jerusalem (11:2). What does this say about God's faithfulness to Israel (see also Ps. 122)? What does it say about Israel's commitment to God?
4. Why do you think Nehemiah devotes so much care to recording the names of the priests and Levites in 12:1-26? Look up Numbers 3:9-10 to help with your answer.
5. What musical instruments accompany the songs and hymns (12:27)? What about music makes it such an appropriate universal response in worship?
6. Chapter 12 describes joyful worship occurring after the people have repented and taken an oath. How are faithfulness and repentance linked to joyful worship?
7. Do you feel great joy during worship? What act of faithfulness or repentance might add to your joy?

8. What does the information recorded in 12:44-47 tell us about the eagerness of the people to fulfill their oaths? Look back at 10:38-39.
9. Read and reflect on Psalm 48:9-14, a song reflecting on a similar time of celebration. What truths about God are celebrated?
10. Think about your own life as a believer. What completed work of "rebuilding" can you worship God for? What area in need of rebuilding can you trust him for?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You for being so merciful to me. I ask that You will give me a heart of great joy. I ask that, by Your Spirit, You will help me remember that You are merciful and kind. Help me to serve willingly in the place You have marked for me. Remind me of the rebuilding You have done and continue to do in my life. I bless Your name for turning mourning into dancing. I give You glory and honor in Jesus' name. Amen.

SESSION 10

DISCIPLINARY ISSUES

NEHEMIAH 13 / PERSONAL STUDY

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Father, incline my heart to Your testimonies. Open my eyes that I might behold wonderful things in Your Word. Unite my heart to fear Your name and satisfy me with Your steadfast love. I ask this by Your Spirit and through Your Son.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you have a friend who goes to prison for stealing. This friend spends several years locked up in a cell and away from his home. Finally, after finishing his sentence, he returns to society. You decide to pay your friend a visit and, to your dismay, you find out that he has returned to a life of stealing. How do you feel? How do you respond?

This scenario is similar to that of Nehemiah. Israel and Judah are exiled for idolatry and disobedience but are eventually allowed to return to Jerusalem. Nehemiah organizes and accomplishes the rebuilding of the wall and the repopulating of the city, setting in place solid leaders to govern. His term as governor complete, he goes back to the court of King Artaxerxes. Returning three years later for a second term, he discovers that Jerusalem's people are still doing the very things for which they were exiled.

READ NEHEMIAH 13 AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. Why was it necessary to remove the Ammonites and Moabites from Israel (13:1-3; Deut. 23:3-6)?
2. In chapter 11 the people commit to not intermarry with other races. Now they recognize that those of non-Jewish descent must be removed from their midst. What negative effects were these non-Jews likely having on the community of believers?
3. The Jews learn that their commitment to remain separate from pagans needs to extend beyond simply avoiding intermarriage. Have you ever repented of a sin only to find that the problem went deeper than you first thought? Why are we sometimes slow to understand the depth of our sin?
4. What evil thing does Eliashib do (13:4-5)? Why is Tobiah, of all people, the wrong person to move into a chamber in the temple courts? (Look back at 2:19-20, especially Tobiah's nationality.)
5. Nehemiah 13 is a chapter about forgetting and remembering. What commands do the people forget during Nehemiah's absence?
6. What does Nehemiah ask God to remember about the corrupt priests during his absence (13:29)?

7. What does Nehemiah ask God to remember about him (13:14, 22, 31)? Does Nehemiah's desire to have his good deeds remembered indicate that he believed he had earned God's favor? Why or why not?
8. Why is it important for us to not forget the commands and faithfulness of God? Look up Isaiah 49:13 to help with your answer.
9. Nehemiah goes to dramatic lengths to restore order. What do you personally think of his actions? Are they eccentric? Extreme? Do you think he is justified in acting this way? Why or why not?
10. How does James 5:19-20 give insight into Nehemiah's motives?
11. What keeps us from confronting a fellow believer about disobedience to God's commands? What would Nehemiah (and James) say about our reasons for avoiding such conflict?

CONCLUSION

As we come to the end, think back over our study of Nehemiah and answer the following questions.

1. What character trait of Nehemiah do you most want to develop? Why?
2. What aspect of God's character is most evident to you in the book? How has reflecting on this character trait deepened your understanding of the gospel?

3. What act of obedience or repentance has the Holy Spirit shown He desires from you?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I ask for Your forgiveness for the times I have treated Your commands lightly. I thank You that, even though I sin, You are kind and gracious to forgive me because of Jesus. I pray that You will give me a heart, like Nehemiah's, that fervently wants to see Your will done. I also pray that I will be faithful to You, not to earn Your favor but because I already have it. Help me maintain the balance between loving people and hating sin. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.