

NEHEMIAH



ru'sā-lēm
and the gate
with fire.
to pass, when
that I sat
and mourned
fasted; and
God of heaven,
beseech thee,
heaven, the
God, that
and mercy for
and observe
now be at-
the eyes open,
hear the prayer
which I pray be-
day and night
of Is'ra-el thy
ness: the sins
of Is'ra-el, which
against thee:
father's house
all very cor-
ree, and have
commandments,
nor the judg-
ou command-
lō'ses.



Let the Word dwell in you.

With Explore the Bible, groups can expect to engage Scripture in its proper context and be better prepared to live it out in their own context. These book-by-book studies will help participants—

- › grow in their love for Scripture;
- › gain new knowledge about what the Bible teaches;
- › develop biblical disciplines;
- › internalize the Word in a way that transforms their lives.



Connect



@ExploreTheBible



facebook.com/ExploreTheBible



lifeway.com/ExploreTheBible



ministrygrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: Nehemiah

© 2014 LifeWay Press®

ISBN 978-1-4300-3675-3

Item 005695957

Dewey decimal classification: 222.8

Subject heading: NEHEMIAH/JERUSALEM—WALL/LEADERSHIP

ERIC GEIGER

Vice President, Church Resources

TONY EVANS

General Editor

TOBY JENNINGS

Managing Editor

JEREMY MAXFIELD

Content Editor

FAITH WHATLEY

Director, Adult Ministry

PHILIP NATION

Director, Adult Ministry Publishing

Send questions/comments to: Content Editor, *Explore the Bible: Adult Small-Group Study*; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152.

Printed in the United States of America

For ordering or inquiries visit www.lifeway.com; write to LifeWay Small Groups; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152; or call toll free 800.458.2772.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers®. Used by permission. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Page 7 quotation: Tony Evans, *Kingdom Man* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 19. Page 17 quotation: Tony Evans, Facebook, 1 December 2013 [cited 25 June 2014]. Page 27 quotation: Corrie Ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 27. Page 37 quotation: Tony Evans, *Kingdom Man*, 43. Page 47 quotation: Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual National Prayer Breakfast," 3 February 1983 [cited 25 June 2014]. Available from the Internet: www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/20383a.htm. Page 57 quotation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, BrainyQuote, cited 25 June 2014. Available from the Internet: www.brainyquote.com.

➤ ABOUT THIS STUDY

SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE. SOMEONE HAS TO TAKE ACTION. WILL IT BE YOU?

God can make a difference through you. No problem is too big. No burden is too heavy. Nothing is too broken. Nobody is too lost. Nowhere is too far away. God is Lord of it all.

Change is possible. It's not easy, but it's possible.

The Book of Nehemiah gives great encouragement to anyone who sees what's wrong in the world and longs to fix it. It's a story of persevering and making the most of every opportunity. God uses people who are willing to take action for His sake.

Explore the Bible: Nehemiah helps you know and apply the encouraging and empowering truth of God's Word. Each session is organized in the following way.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT: This page explains the original context of each passage and begins relating the primary themes to your life today.

EXPLORE THE TEXT: These pages walk you through Scripture, providing helpful commentary and encouraging thoughtful interaction with God through His Word.

OBEY THE TEXT: This page helps you apply the truths you've explored. It's not enough to know what the Bible says. God's Word has the power to change your life.

LEADER GUIDE: This final section provides optional discussion starters and suggested questions to help anyone lead a group in reviewing each section of the personal study.

➤ GROUP COMMITMENT

As you begin this study, it's important that everyone agrees to key group values. Clearly establishing the purpose of your time together will foster healthy expectations and help ease any uncertainties. The goal is to ensure that everyone has a positive experience leading to spiritual growth and true community. Initial each value as you discuss the following with your group.

❑ PRIORITY

Life is busy, but we value this time with one another and with God's Word. We choose to make being together a priority.

❑ PARTICIPATION

We're a group. Everyone is encouraged to participate. No one dominates.

❑ RESPECT

Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions. All questions are encouraged and respected.

❑ TRUST

Each person humbly seeks truth through time in prayer and in the Bible. We trust God as the loving authority in our lives.

❑ CONFIDENTIALITY

Anything said in our meetings is never repeated outside the group without the permission of everyone involved. This commitment is vital in creating an environment of trust and openness.

❑ SUPPORT

Everyone can count on anyone in this group. Permission is given to call on one another at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group provides care for every member.

❑ ACCOUNTABILITY

We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in the loving ways we decide on. Questions are always welcome. Unsolicited advice, however, isn't permitted.

I agree to all the commitments.

Date

➤ GENERAL EDITOR



Dr. Tony Evans is one of America's most respected leaders in evangelical circles. He is a pastor, a best-selling author, and a frequent speaker at Bible conferences and seminars throughout the nation.

Dr. Evans has served as the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas, for more than 35 years. He is also the founder and president of The Urban Alternative, a ministry that seeks to restore hope and transform lives through the proclamation and application of God's Word.

Dr. Evans is the author of more than 50 books, including the following LifeWay short-term Bible studies: *Victory in Spiritual Warfare*, *Kingdom Man*, *Kingdom Agenda*, *It's Not Too Late*, and *The Power of God's Names*. For information about these Bible studies, please visit www.lifeway.com/tonyevans.



▶ CONTENTS

Session 1	God Inspires the Work (<i>Nehemiah 2:1-8,17-18</i>)	6
Session 2	Establish Justice in God’s Community (<i>Nehemiah 5:1-13</i>)	16
Session 3	Be Faithful in Adversity (<i>Nehemiah 6:1-19</i>).....	26
Session 4	Do Your Appointed Part (<i>Nehemiah 7:1-7</i>)	36
Session 5	Get an Understanding (<i>Nehemiah 8:1-12</i>)	46
Session 6	Commit Your Way to the Lord (<i>Nehemiah 10:28-39</i>)...	56
Leader Guide	66

SESSION 1

GOD *INSPIRES* *THE WORK*

God restores His repentant people to do work that honors Him.



▶ ABOUT THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

In the fifth century B.C., during the height of the Persian Empire, a descendant of a sworn enemy of God's people rose to a position of great power in the empire. He used this position to plan and receive authorization for a genocide against the Jews, many of whom were living in exile in the heartland of the empire. (See the Book of Esther.)

The Sovereign God, however, had different plans for His exiled people. Through prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Lord God had declared that He would one day restore the covenant people to the promised land (see Jer. 33:7-9; Ezek. 36:24-28). This restoration would have political aspects, to be sure. But more important, God's people would be restored spiritually. The Lord would forgive their waywardness, draw them to Himself, and give them a new heart and spirit. They would be restored in their faith and in obedience to God's Word.

The Old Testament Books of Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah chronicle events surrounding the Lord's restoration of Jewish exiles to the promised land. The books bear the names of three Jewish heroes of the faith—ordinary believers who accomplished extraordinary things as a result of God's mighty, providential hand and their bold, obedient faith.

AUTHOR

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain sections that can be called memoirs, and those sections were most likely written by the two men. Yet most Bible scholars believe the books were brought into their final form by a single individual. Jewish tradition identifies that chronicler as Ezra, who is known from the text to have been a skilled scribe (see Neh. 8:1,9).

DATE

If the final compilation of Ezra-Nehemiah happened as described in the previous paragraph, then the date of writing logically followed soon after the close of Nehemiah's ministry in Jerusalem. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes (444 B.C.; see 2:1). According to 13:6, Nehemiah returned to Babylon in the king's 32nd year, or around 432 B.C. Sometime later, Nehemiah requested and received a second leave of absence. He traveled to Jerusalem again, where he spent an undetermined amount of time leading the people in religious and social reforms (13:7-31). Thus, Bible scholars suggest that Ezra-Nehemiah was finalized around 430 B.C.

PURPOSE

Ezra-Nehemiah continues the history of God's people as told in 1–2 Chronicles. The restoration of Jewish exiles to the promised land highlights the Lord's faithfulness in keeping His promises. It also emphasizes the spiritual transformation needed by all people. Their stories can inspire us today as followers of Christ. Just as God showed His providential presence with and care for the Jewish exiles in the fifth century B.C., He continues to show His care for His people today. He continues to call believers to live boldly in faith, and He continues to provide servant leadership for His people.

▶ NEHEMIAH 2:1-8,17-18

1 During the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was set before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had never been sad in his presence, **2** so the king said to me, “Why are you sad, when you aren’t sick? This is nothing but depression.” I was overwhelmed with fear **3** and replied to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should I not be sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” **4** Then the king asked me, “What is your request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven **5** and answered the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, send me to Judah and to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I may rebuild it.” **6** The king, with the queen seated beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you return?” So I gave him a definite time, and it pleased the king to send me. **7** I also said to the king: “If it pleases the king, let me have letters written to the governors of the region west of the Euphrates River, so that they will grant me safe passage until I reach Judah. **8** And let me have a letter written to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so that he will give me timber to rebuild the gates of the temple’s fortress, the city wall, and the home where I will live.” The king granted my requests, for I was graciously strengthened by my God.

17 So I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned down. Come, let’s rebuild Jerusalem’s wall, so that we will no longer be a disgrace.” **18** I told them how the gracious hand of my God had been on me, and what the king had said to me. They said, “Let’s start rebuilding,” and they were encouraged to do this good work.

Think About It

Circle the different emotions Nehemiah exhibited and underline the issues prompting them.

What do these emotions suggest to you about Nehemiah?

► UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

I'M NOT THE HERO TYPE. HOW CAN I POSSIBLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE? SURELY SOMEONE ELSE COULD DO BETTER! HAVE YOU EVER HAD THOUGHTS LIKE THIS?

If so, you're not alone. Most of us have or will have them along the way. Very few people go through this life without at some point feeling unprepared—if not powerless—to make a difference. The real question is what we can do to move past those feelings.

The Book of Nehemiah picks up where the Book of Ezra ended. Jerusalem's wall had been toppled and torn apart in 586 B.C. as the people were taken into exile (see 2 Kings 25:10-11). Some 50 years later, a first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild. Then Ezra led another group of exiles to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. Fourteen years later, however, an important task of restoration remained undone. The wall around Jerusalem lay in ruins.

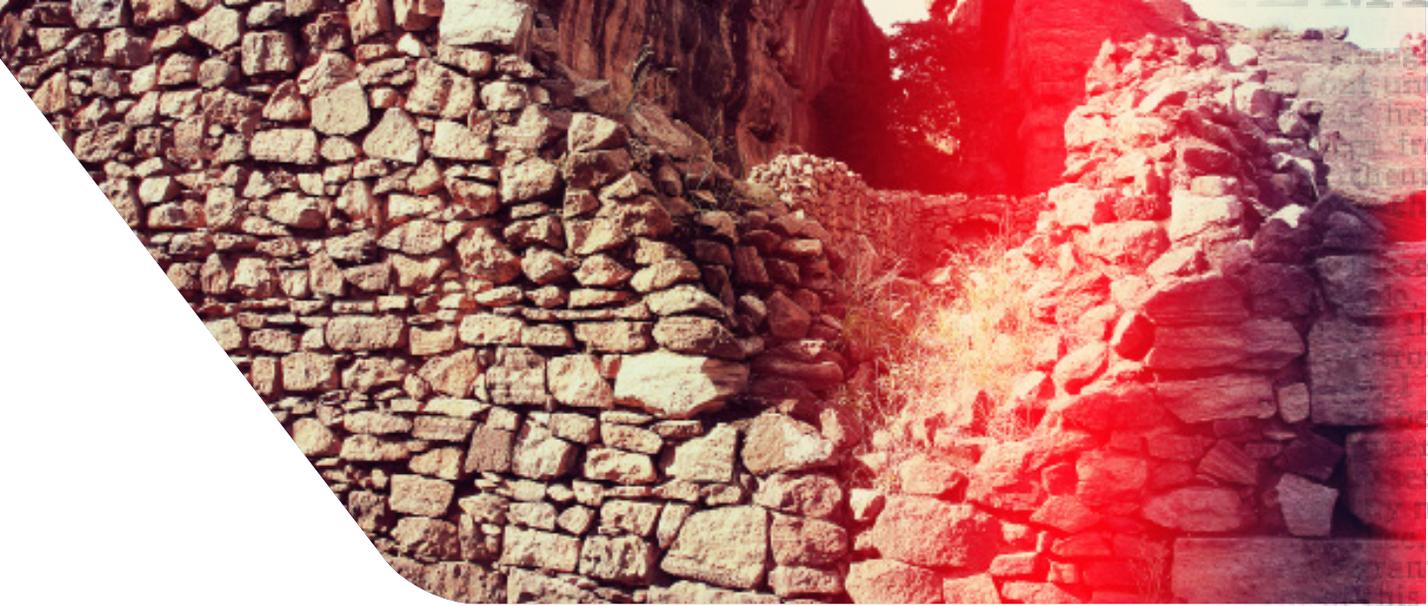
Nehemiah lived in Susa in 445 B.C. He was still in exile, and he served as the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. (This was the same king who had earlier commissioned Ezra's return to Jerusalem.) The royal cupbearer was one of the king's most trusted officials; he put his life on the line for the king every day. The cupbearer had a dual role: first, to taste whatever the king desired to drink, ensuring it was poison free; second, to provide security for the king's living quarters. Nehemiah's job wasn't menial; it was a role of influence and honor.

One day Nehemiah received a visit from a delegation of men from Judah (see Neh. 1:2). The men told him of the shameful state of affairs that continued to depress Jerusalem. Nehemiah was heartbroken. He fasted and prayed. He repented and pleaded with God to complete the restoration of His people (see 1:4-10). In the midst of his prayer, Nehemiah seemed to realize that he would have a part in what God was about to do. He also knew if God called him to serve, then God would have to make it possible for him to leave Susa. So Nehemiah prayed for grace and success while serving the king (see 1:11).



**"WHEN GOD SEARCHES
FOR A MAN TO
ADVANCE HIS KINGDOM,
DOES HE CALL YOUR
NAME?"**

—Dr. Tony Evans



► EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISTRESS EXPOSED (Read Nehemiah 2:1-3.)

Four months elapsed from the time Nehemiah received the news about Jerusalem until he had an opportunity to speak to the king. What did Nehemiah do during those four months? Nehemiah 1:4 suggests that he continued to pray and to look for an opportunity to help. We can also assume that he thought about ideas for getting the wall rebuilt—what materials would be needed, how to acquire them, and where to rally the workforce. He wanted to be ready when God showed him the right moment to act.

That moment came during the month of Nisan (the first month on the Jewish calendar). Nehemiah was carrying out his normal duties as cupbearer. Wine had been delivered, so Nehemiah tested it before giving some to the king. He always performed this duty with a good attitude, because it was standard practice to enter the king's presence with a pleasant demeanor.

This time, however, the king recognized that his normally happy cupbearer was heartsick about something. A sudden wave of panic washed over Nehemiah. He had violated the cupbearer's code of conduct. It was an uncharacteristic lapse in his work ethic. But it was also an opportunity to trust God and to explain his situation to the king.

How can times of sadness or fear also become opportunities to grow in your faith?

Nehemiah opened his heart to the king. He first addressed the king with respect and then expressed his deep concern in the form of a question. The question gave the king latitude either to abruptly end the conversation or to graciously seek to help his heartsick servant.

Nehemiah referred to Jerusalem as the place where his ancestors were buried. Most ancient people groups treasured their ancestral burial grounds. A family's living members were responsible for preserving and maintaining the burial site. The king of Persia knew this, and he sympathized with Nehemiah's concern over the broken-down condition of his ancestral city.

Nehemiah carefully chose his words, framing his concern in nonpolitical and nonreligious terms. In doing so, he calmed any potential suspicions. Instead of immediately telling the king what he wanted to do, Nehemiah sparked the king's compassion and understanding.

What role should tactfulness play in a Christ follower's interactions with those who may not know Christ?

REQUEST PRESENTED

(Read Nehemiah 2:4-5.)

The king responded by asking Nehemiah to specify his request. But before Nehemiah spoke another word to the king, he prayed. The content of the prayer wasn't recorded, yet this prayer confirmed Nehemiah's deep faith. He had spent the past four months praying for God to act in a big way to help Jerusalem. Now God had put Nehemiah in a situation to have a conversation with the world's wealthiest, most powerful human ruler. And that ruler had just asked Nehemiah, in effect: "What do you want to do, and how can I help?"

What can we learn from Nehemiah about prayerful humility?

KEY DOCTRINE

Stewardship

Believers are obligated to serve God with our time, talents, and material possessions. God entrusts us with these resources to use for His glory and for the benefit of others.

Nehemiah maintained a respectful, diplomatic tone to the king's authority. He knew his plan of action depended on the king's willingness to grant a leave of absence. Nehemiah further appealed to the king's favor. He asked the king to send him to Judah to rebuild the city of his ancestors—that is, Jerusalem. It was a huge, bold vision that in time would play a role in an even greater, God-sized plan. Jerusalem would one day be the place where salvation for sinners was accomplished through the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Matt. 20:17-19).

PREPARATIONS MADE (*Read Nehemiah 2:6-8.*)

The abrupt appearance in this verse of the queen sitting beside the king may indicate that this conversation was a separate, more private occasion than the one described in 2:1-5. In any case, the king wanted to learn a few additional details about Nehemiah's plan. In particular, he wanted to know how long Nehemiah would be away and when he could expect Nehemiah to return to Susa. Nehemiah specified a time of return, a fact that underscores the careful planning he had done over the previous months. We aren't told the time of return in this verse, but we learn from 5:14 and 13:6 that Nehemiah spent 12 years in Jerusalem before returning to Susa.

Constantly thinking ahead, Nehemiah sought to obtain written documents of authority that he knew he would need to travel safely through the outlying provinces and to complete his work in Jerusalem. History had already shown that non-Israelite groups around Judah would try to sabotage any attempts the Jews made to rebuild their covenant heritage (see Ezra 4:11-23). Nehemiah anticipated that he too would encounter resistance from the enemies of God's people.

Wall surrounding the old city of Jerusalem



Then Nehemiah requested a specific letter of authority to the official who had responsibility for the king's forest (likely the great cedar forests located in Lebanon, where prized timber was cut and sold all over the ancient world). The Jews under Zerubbabel had acquired timber from there to use in the rebuilding of the temple (see Ezra 3:7). Nehemiah wanted the timber for constructing the gates, stabilizing the wall, and building his residence.

The king granted all these requests. Yet Nehemiah, like Ezra, knew that neither he nor the king of Persia was the decisive player in the restoration of God's people. God was providentially at work, strengthening and using His willing servant Nehemiah.

How does Nehemiah's request for written documents from the king demonstrate a balance of taking personal responsibility and trusting God's sovereignty?

REBUILDING BEGUN (Nehemiah 2:17-18)

After arriving in Jerusalem and privately examining the conditions around the city (see 2:11-16), Nehemiah spoke to the citizens and challenged the people to rebuild. He identified with them and with the distress the city was experiencing. They needed the wall's physical protection for security. But it was the spiritual reality that distressed Nehemiah the most. The holy city was a disgrace. The crumbled wall was a reproach to the name of God, a matter of scorn and ridicule by Jerusalem's pagan neighbors. The honor of God's name was at stake.

In his effort to rally the people, Nehemiah reminded them of God's providence, protection, and sufficiency. God's hand, symbolic of His guidance and action, was evident. The king's words of permission and authority came next. This was acknowledged in the right order. The people were encouraged and committed themselves to the task ahead. Nehemiah's leadership, the people's partnership, and God's authority inspired them to work.

BIBLE SKILL

Identify ways contemporaries use a word or phrase.

Ezra and Nehemiah both referred to the hand of God (see Ezra 7:9; 8:18; Neh. 2:18). Use a Bible concordance to locate other uses of the phrase "the hand of God" and compare them to the ways Ezra and Nehemiah used the term.

What factors might influence the way a person views the hand of God?

► OBEY THE TEXT

Believers can pray and ask God for guidance when they're distressed over conditions in their communities. Christ wants His followers to be involved in His kingdom work. He helps them prepare and gives them opportunities to serve in His plan of redemption.

In what specific ways does our culture today directly or indirectly dishonor God?

What are you doing to prepare yourself to be used by God? What role does prayer have in that preparation? What can your group do to encourage one another to serve Christ?

What opportunities is God placing in front of you? What plan do you see Him working out in your life? What are you doing in response to His direction?



MEMORIZE

"The king asked me, 'What is your request?'
So I prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh. 2:4).

Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you will put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

