



STUDY NOTES FOR:

# INDIVIDUALS & SMALL GROUPS

# INTRODUCTION

## NEHEMIAH'S PLACE IN GOD'S STORY

After the exile, God is renewing his people in the land, in order to carry out what he promised to Abraham. God's people must renew their commitment to covenant faithfulness, laying hold of God's forgiveness and seeking to practice purity in their corporate and private lives. God in his mercy raised up Ezra the priest and teacher, and Nehemiah the governor, to lead his people in the hard work that this renewal requires. The public ceremonies of chapters 8–10 enact this renewal, confessing past unfaithfulness and recognising that everything—including the fulfilling of Israel's mission to bring light to the world—depends on God's grace and steadfast commitment to his promises (9:32–38).

## AUTHOR AND DATE

Nehemiah is the central figure in the book, and it contains some of his own records, but he is not the author of the whole book. The author is probably the same as the author of Ezra. Jews had been taken into exile in Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., but in 539 King Cyrus of Persia overthrew the Babylonian king, Nabonidus. By doing so, he took control of a vast empire, including the territory of the former kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Beginning in 538 B.C., Cyrus issued a decree that the Jewish exiles were free to return to their ancestral home. Nehemiah arrived in the third wave of returning exiles to Jerusalem in 445 B.C. He returned for a further visit sometime between 433 and 423 B.C. He may have made several journeys between Persian capitals and Jerusalem in this period of 20 years.

## KEY THEMES

The overarching theme is the Lord's protection of his people and the need for faithfulness in worship obeying God's word.

1. The Lord hears prayer (1:4–6).
2. The Lord works providentially, especially through powerful rulers, to bring about his greater purposes (e.g., 2:8).
3. The Lord protects his people; therefore, they do not need to be afraid (4:14).
4. The Lord is merciful and faithful to his promises despite his people's persistence in sin (9:32–35).
5. Worship is at the centre of the life of God's people, and it includes the willing, joyful giving of their resources (10:32–39).
6. God's people need to be on their guard against their own moral weakness (ch. 13).

## LITERARY FEATURES

Nehemiah is a sequel to Ezra. Two main actions occur: rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem and the recommitment of the returned exiles to fulfil their covenant obligations. There is something for virtually everyone—a general's diary, a governor's report, a civil record, a management handbook, and a memoir—all in one short book. The events covered span approximately 13 years. Nehemiah emerges from the pages as a godly and decisive leader. The book of Nehemiah displays the same mixture of narrative and documentary material as Ezra, but it possesses a stronger narrative flair. The rebuilding of the city wall becomes a full-fledged conflict story, replete with suspense and heroism. The covenant-renewal ceremony (chs. 8–9) is one of the grand dramas in the Bible. But documentary material continually interrupts the flow of the narrative, showing the historical impulse of the author.

# NOTES ON SMALL GROUPS

My hope for small groups is that they are a place of encouragement, challenge and fellowship on our Christian journeys. The questions offer a framework but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions on God's word.

My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what's God been showing them recently, what have you found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. To finish, it would be good to pray together. You might like to use worship music, quiet, and other ways to respond.

Please don't neglect to have fun and enjoy spending time together - even if you're meeting online. You may need to be inventive in finding ways to support one another and to include all members of your group.

Enjoy!

## MORE RESOURCES

These notes, Sunday sermons and more can be found at:  
[www.allsaintswick.org.uk/Resources](http://www.allsaintswick.org.uk/Resources)

### **Recommended for further reading:**

- *A Passion for Faithfulness* by J.I.Packer (Aims to show through Nehemiah how God can be involved in every area of our life, including our work)
- *Excellence in Leadership* by John White (Focusses on what Nehemiah has to show us about Leadership)
- *Ezra and Nehemiah* by Derek Kidner (A commentary, but very readable)

# 1. NEHEMIAH 1

## PASSIONATE IN PRAYER

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When Nehemiah learned of the sad state of Jerusalem, he wept, mourned, and fasted. Do reports of the sad state of a church affect you the same way?

Why or why not?

When you hear bad reports about the state of a church, do you instinctively pray the way that Nehemiah did when he heard about Jerusalem?

What can we do to increase our personal investment in spiritual matters?

How do you think Nehemiah became someone who instinctively responded to challenges by crying out to the Lord?

What can we do to develop a habit of prayer?

Have you ever considered if a form of fasting (not necessarily from food) might help you find time to build a closer walk with the Lord?

Do you have any recent answers to prayer to share and encourage others with?

Why is prayer so important if we are to regather, refocus and rebuild what God has called us to?

# 2. NEHEMIAH 2:1-18

## PRAYER LEADING TO ACTION

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If the Lord gave you an opportunity to advance His kingdom, what aspects of “staying in the Persian palace” would be the most tempting alternative/excuse?

When you come into a new situation like the one awaiting Nehemiah in Jerusalem, do you have a tendency to go straight to work, or do you have the patience to survey the situation first?

To what did Nehemiah appeal when he sought to motivate the people in Jerusalem to join him in the rebuilding of the walls?

Does it ever feel like we have to choose between prayer or action? Or does prayer often lead to action?

How does Nehemiah show us that it's not unfaithful to try and be the answers to our own prayers?

Are there things you've been praying for, that God might be equipping you to take action towards?

Can you share a current prayer request? Are there ideas for how to take godly action in that situation?

# 3. NEHEMIAH 4:1-15

## TRUST IN THE LORD'S PROTECTION

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Why do you think Nehemiah answered the scoffers in 2:20 but did not respond to them in chapter 4?

In Nehemiah's day, Sanballat and Tobiah were mocking those rebuilding the wall. Now God's people are striving to advance His kingdom. What form does mocking take today?

Against what would we pray if we were to follow Nehemiah's example today? How might grace come into play in these situations?

Nehemiah led the people to set a guard against the enemies day and night (4:9). What should God's people be on guard against day and night today?

How can Christians discourage other Christians today?

What does it look like to be more of an **encourager**?

Why did Nehemiah redouble his defences and rebuilding efforts in the face of discouragement (4:13)?

What were his other options? Why was taking action his best option?

How might you direct the eyes of others to the great and awe-inspiring Lord, as Nehemiah did (4:14)?

# 4. NEHEMIAH 5:1-13

## GENEROUS WITH GOD-GIVEN RESOURCES

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What does it say about Nehemiah that he would follow the account of the financial oppression of God's people with indications of his own phenomenal wealth? What point was he trying to make?

Evidently some of the wealthier people were taking advantage of others who had put themselves at financial risk so they could work on the wall. In what ways do some people today oppress or take advantage of those who are devoting themselves to gospel ministry?

Are there any ways that we are ever tempted to take advantage of others for financial gain?

Do those around you perceive that you are pursuing God or pursuing gold? What might make them think that money is too important in your life?

Do you feel guilty about the ways that God has provided for you financially? Should you feel less guilt than you do?

Should you feel more guilt than you do? Are you worshiping money rather than God?

Is your hope set on God rather than wealth?



# 5. NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

## GOD'S WORD FORMS GOD'S PEOPLE

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What benefits do children gain from attending a worship service of their own? What benefits from attending with their parents?

How do we show reverence for God's Word without worshiping a book?

Have you known anyone whose joy was contagious, whose enthusiasm was infectious? Describe that person's personality.

What evidence do you see that God feels that kind of joy for you? Is the joy of the Lord your stronghold?

What can you do to increase or decrease the joy that God feels for you? What can you do to increase your experience or appreciation of God's joy?

How do you celebrate God's provision for you as you sojourn toward the new and better promised land, the new heaven and new earth?

Do you have a tendency to interpret your life through the lens of the Bible or the Bible through the lens of your life?

What would change if you became convinced of the Lord's joy in you—if the joy of the Lord became your stronghold?

# 6. NEHEMIAH 9:1-31

## CONFESSING SIN TO FIND FREEDOM

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What is the value in contemplating the seriousness and immensity of your accumulated sins?

What is the danger in doing so? What is the danger in never doing so?

If you were going to summarise the whole Old Testament using a few headings, what would they be?

Why did this prayer of confession begin with creation? How might doing the same make our own prayers more meaningful?

Does the idea of Sabbath seem to you more like a gift or an imposition?

What stands in the way of your enjoyment of the Sabbath?

Is God pleased or offended when we appeal to Him for mercy?

Can you think of another example that expresses similar love and mercy?

# 7. NEHEMIAH 12:27-47

## DEDICATING OURSELVES TO THE LORD

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How is what is happening in a local church more significant for eternity than what happens in your nation's government?

What can you do to bless the people around you who have made choices that put them at risk or that go against their own interests?

Why is it important for us to remember our spiritual heritage?

What are the advantages and dangers of remaining mindful of the past?

Have you ever been involved in a dedication ceremony?

How does the idea of dedicating something to God change now that his Spirit lives not in a building, but in his people's hearts?

Why would Nehemiah point out twice that the worship was performed in accordance with the command of David (12:24,45)?

Are there areas of your life that you know you hold back from God? Can you ask for prayer to help you dedicate those things to him too?

What would it look like for our church to be full of people whose whole lives are dedicated to the Lord?

# 8. NEHEMIAH 13:1-22

## GOD CONVICTS US BECAUSE HE LOVES US

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If and when a person confronts you about something you've done wrong, do you tend to become angry and defensive, or do you repent out of humility and gratitude for the correction?

Based on how you respond to various methods of confrontation, how might you go about speaking to others if you can see something serious in their life?

If your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, are there virtual Ammonites that have taken up residence in the chambers of the temple?

What did Nehemiah mean when he prayed that God would “remember” him, what he had done, and what others had done?

What would you like God to remember about your life?

Do you bring your concerns to the Lord as consistently as Nehemiah did?

What can you do over the next week to develop better prayer habits?

Is it significant that Nehemiah begins and ends in prayer? What does that have to show us?

What has the Lord shown you through your time with Nehemiah?