

UNDER 
RECONSTRUCTION
RENEWAL AFTER RUIN

NEHEMIAH

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Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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How to Use *Truth for Living*

Truth for Living:

A comprehensive, trustworthy curriculum that presents the truth of God's Word without compromise. The curriculum plan includes through-the-Bible courses as well as topical courses. Perfect for adults who want a guide in using all of God's Word as God intended.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Truth for Living* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. Most of the questions in the leader's guide are picked up from the Bible study book. You will notice the question numbers in parentheses after the questions. The answers to the questions are in italics following the questions.

Other Resources

The resource CD has PowerPoint presentations for every lesson. They incorporate the resource visuals and provide a good way for teachers and learners to track the lesson. Other resources include lesson outlines and promotional materials.

Preface

What does it take to become a spiritual leader? Is there a course we can take? Is there a degree we can get? Are there certain requirements we need to meet? A checklist to check off?

Nehemiah teaches us that leadership begins not with a course or a degree but with brokenness. He humbly recognized that he fell short of God's standard for His people and confessed his sin to God. That humble act opened the way for Nehemiah to become God's leader in post-exilic Jerusalem.

The book of Nehemiah records God's process of rebuilding the wall and city of Jerusalem through Nehemiah, a rebuilt spiritual leader. Nehemiah's leadership through Jerusalem's years of struggle and triumph provides an excellent example for us to follow, beginning with his brokenness.

God doesn't want us to offer ourselves to Him as a polished, self-prepared person He could use to do great things. He wants us first of all to come to Him in humility with an honest understanding of who we are and an honest dependence on Him. God is not interested in self-made leaders. He is interested in broken servants ready to be built by Him. God uses the leaders *He* builds as the builders in His work.

As you teach this course, emphasize to your learners that all of them are spiritual leaders to some degree by virtue of being an adult. Children, young people, new believers all look to established believers in your church for leadership. Remind your learners that they influence people whether they realize it or not. This course is important for everyone.

Take time to let God use the book of Nehemiah to build you into a godly leader. Focus on what God wants you to learn before you think about your learners. As you do, God will be faithful to build you and to prepare you for the leadership roles He has for you.



Broken Leader



Topic

Concern

Theme

A spiritual leader shows concern for people and God's name.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine how he might increase his level of concern for people and God's name.

Materials

- Resources 1-3
- Visuals 1 and 2

Scripture Focus

Nehemiah 1:1–3

Summary

Nehemiah, cupbearer for the king of Persia, received disturbing news from his brother Hanani, who had arrived in Persia from Jerusalem. Hanani reported that the Jews in Jerusalem were suffering great affliction and reproach, the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and the city's gates were burned.

Outline

I. The Man (Neh. 1:1)

- A. His family (1:1)
- B. His significance (1:1)

II. The Setting (Neh. 1:2)

III. The Challenges (Neh. 1:3)

- A. Affliction (1:3)
- B. Reproach (1:3)
- C. Disrepair (1:3)

Memory Verse

"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2).

GETTING STARTED

Family Name

ASK: Whose family name do you highly respect? Why? (Q1)

ASK: For whose family name do you have little or no respect? Why? (Q2)

ASK: In what sense do you represent God's "family name"? (Q3)

Nehemiah felt responsible for God's family name. He wanted it to shine for all the world to see. For that to happen, he knew God's people needed to turn to God and then rely on Him to work through them. This lesson gives us a glimpse into Nehemiah's heart for God and challenges us to share Nehemiah's concern for God's "family name."

Who Is a Leader?

ASK: Are all adults spiritual leaders? Explain.

ASK: In what sense are you a spiritual leader?

Every adult believer is a spiritual leader to someone. Children and teens look up to us as do other believers. We should be sensitive to the needs of those we lead. We should also be sensitive to God's reputation. How do our lives reflect on God? Nehemiah was concerned about helping others so God's reputation would shine. We should share his concerns. People we lead still have needs and God's reputation is still at stake.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Having previewed the idea of leadership that runs throughout Nehemiah's book, we focus our attention now on the backdrop to the story in Nehemiah 1:1-3, where we find Nehemiah, a faithful Jew, serving in the court of the king, Artaxerxes, in the Medo-Persian Empire.

The Babylonian/Medo-Persian captivity had originally come upon Judah as a chastisement from God due in part to her violation of the law of the seventh-year Sabbath (Lev. 25:1-7). God warned that there would be one year of captivity for every year of failure to institute this law (2 Chron. 36:20, 21; Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10; cf. Lev. 26:33-35). The captivity was carried out in accord with the "blessings and cursings" sections in the Pentateuch (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The 605 BC conquering of Judah by Babylon was specifically prophesied by Isaiah to King Hezekiah in Isa. 39:7 after he showed the Temple treasures to the Babylonians (cf. 2 Kings 20:17, 18).

The Babylonian captivity of Judah was originally presided over by Nebuchadnezzar, who succeeded his father as king of Babylon in 605 BC. When Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, it appears the Jews submitted to him without a battle

(2 Chron. 36:6, 7). Thus began the first of three waves of captivity and destruction which Babylon brought upon Judah in 605, 597, and 586 BC as her seventy-year Babylonian captivity commenced.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to show the geographical and historical setting of the book of Nehemiah.

Those taken captive in 605 BC included Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1). Those taken captive in 597 BC included Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:14–16). The final round of captivity in 586 BC affected Jeremiah who was forced to go to Egypt where he prophesied further regarding Babylon (Jer. 43; 44; 52:31–34). The city of Jerusalem and the Temple were also destroyed in the third wave of captivity (2 Kings 25:1–21).

Daniel 5 tells the story of the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians on Oct. 12, 539 BC. The Medo-Persian empire then had control of the captive Jewish people. Truly God is in sovereign control of the nations (cf. Jer. 18:7–10).

I. The Man (Neh. 1:1)

Just as there had been three waves of captivity, so there would be three waves of return. In 538 BC, Zerubbabel led the first return of roughly 50,000 Jews after the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1–4), which had earlier been prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28–45:7).

The group that returned with Zerubbabel was significant primarily for its ultimate rebuilding of the temple in 516 BC, as prompted by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah.

In 458 BC, Ezra led 7,000 to 8,000 Jews in the second return to the land (Ezra 7:1–10). Despite its small size, this group took part in a great spiritual revival under Ezra's leadership (Ezra 9, 10).

Nehemiah led the third wave back from captivity in 445 BC (Neh. 2). His small group was a catalyst in the enormous task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.

Scripture tells us nothing about the man Nehemiah outside of the book that bears his name. Surprisingly, there are no direct references to this great leader in the New Testament.

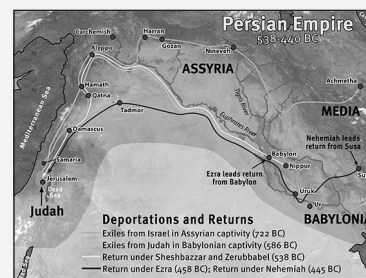
A. His family (1:1)

It must have been difficult for Nehemiah's parents to raise their family in a strange land. Judging by the name they gave him, "the comfort of Jehovah," and the character traits they instilled in him, it seems evident that they were a godly couple. We know nothing of them except the testimony of their son. Effective spiritual leaders are often the product of a godly home (Ps. 127; Prov. 22:6).

ASK: Why would the name "the comfort of Jehovah" be a reminder of the need to show concern for others? (Q4) *God comforts us so we might comfort others. See 2 Corinthians 1:3 and 4.*

B. His significance (1:1)

History can rightly be called "His story," meaning God's story. God is in control of times, events, and people. Although it seems strange that a Jew served in the

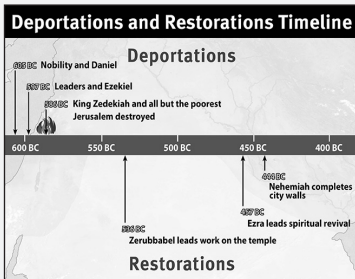


Archaeologists discovered Elephantine Papyri in Egypt in 1907 that date back to Nehemiah's time. The papyri include letters sent to and from Jerusalem. Several men referred to in Nehemiah are mentioned in this material, as well as several other facts about Nehemiah's recorded events.

Nehemiah was the third in a string of Jewish captives who rose to the level of serving in the court of the king of Medo-Persia, being preceded by Daniel, who served as third in command under Cyrus and Darius (Dan. 5:31-6:3), and Esther, the queen beside Ahasuerus or Xerxes (Esth. 2:17).

court of a Persian king, it was by no means an accident. God had Nehemiah right where He wanted him.

Nehemiah was living in the Persian king’s winter palace in Shushan (Dan. 8:2; Esth. 1:2) during the month of Chislev (November/December) (Neh. 1:1). That Nehemiah was in the winter palace and close to the king indicates that Nehemiah had an important position in Persia. Just as God had put Esther on a queen’s throne in Persia to deliver the Jews from wicked Haman’s plot (Esther 8), so He put Nehemiah in the royal court of a Persian king to accomplish His next major step in Israel’s history.



VISUAL: Display visual 1, showing how God would use Nehemiah to complete the restoration of His people.

ASK: Knowing that God controlled key people and events in Bible history, can we safely say that He controls key people and events in our lives today? **Explain.** (Q5) *God is as sovereign today as He was throughout the Bible. We may not witness God’s miracles and obvious displays of His sovereignty like some in the Bible did, but that is not a sign that God is any less sovereign today.*

ASK: Why is a belief that God is sovereign such a key conviction for a spiritual leader? (Q6) *Believing in God’s sovereignty encourages a leader to depend on God and to refrain from using manipulation or other self-reliant means of solving problems.*

TESTIMONY: Share an example of God’s obvious working in your life. (Q7)

II. The Setting (Neh. 1:2)

Like Daniel before him, Nehemiah was fixated on Jerusalem and its destroyed temple. Note his level of concern for a place he had never visited.

READ: Nehemiah 1:2.

Nehemiah’s inquiry into the state of the Jews in the Promised Land came ninety-two years after Zerubbabel first led a return of captives back to Jerusalem. During those years, God used Persian kings to accomplish His plan to repopulate and restore Judah. God’s pattern continued in Nehemiah’s day. He planned to use Artaxerxes I to further His plans to strengthen Judah.

VISUAL: Display visual 2 as a summary of God’s use of Persian kings in Judah’s restoration.

Persian King	Reign (BC)	Biblical Events
Cyrus	539–529	• Conquered Babylon • Decreed permission for Jews to return to Judah
Cambyses	529–522	• Not as favorable to Jews
Darius I	521–486	• Authorized Jews to rebuild the temple
Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	486–465	• Married Esther • Spared Jews from Haman’s wicked plot
Artaxerxes I (Loghmanus)	465–425	• Authorized Nehemiah to return and rebuild Jerusalem’s wall

Hanani, Nehemiah’s brother, and others from Judah visited Nehemiah in the king’s palace. Some commentators believe that Hanani, meaning “the grace of the Lord,” came from Jerusalem on business unrelated to Jerusalem’s condition. The text explains neither the timing nor the nature of his trip, so we don’t know for sure why he went to Jerusalem or why he came back to see Nehemiah. It’s possible he was part of the group that returned in 458 BC.

Nehemiah asked about Jerusalem and its residents. His questions reveal his genuine interest in and concern for God’s people. His concern for them was driven by his desire to see God’s people glorify God’s name once again. Nehemiah could have been proudly content with his noble position in Persia and disinterested in Jerusalem and the needs of those less fortunate. This was not in his character, however. God’s glory was at the forefront of his mind.

ASK: Put yourself in Nehemiah’s place. What thoughts and feelings would you have in your comfortable situation upon learning about the plight of your fellow Jews in Jerusalem? (Q8)

ASK: What might happen to the ministry of a spiritual leader who does not have the qualities of genuine interest and concern for others? (Q9) *Uncaring leaders are often driven by selfish desires. Those desires prevent them from serving others effectively because they refuse to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others.*

III. The Challenges (Neh. 1:3)

A. Affliction (1:3)

Hanani did not merely say the Jews back home were afflicted, he reported that they were “in great affliction.” Hanani used a term with the root idea of “evil.” In other passages the term conveys physical pain (Num. 16:15; Ps. 105:15). Sometimes it bears the idea of emotional pain (Gen 43:6; 1 Kings 17:20). In Ruth 1:21, the word describes the physical and emotional pain Naomi experienced in losing her family.

Nehemiah’s kindred in Judah wrestled against discouragement and danger. Their enemies hassled them relentlessly, using political and military pressure to crush their rebuilding efforts. In addition, their disobedience to God caused them discomfort too.

B. Reproach (1:3)

The Jews in their homeland were also in “reproach.” To be in reproach means to be disgraced. The Jews boasted of their glorious and faithful God, but their land still lay in ruin. Their apathy and neglect gave God a bad name. It appeared to the Jews’ enemies that God was a rather pathetic, anemic God. If their God was so great, why didn’t they rebuild their city? Why was God’s temple still surrounded by ruins left from an invasion that happened decades earlier? Hanani understandably felt embarrassed by the lack of progress in Judah. We know from the prophet Haggai that the repatriated Jews wouldn’t have even built the temple if it weren’t for his preaching (Hag. 1:2–5).

READ: Haggai 1:3–15. **ASK:** Summarize Haggai’s message to the remnant of Jews living in the land. (Q10) *Haggai told the Jews to stop trying to fill their own pockets while God’s house remained in disrepair. God would not allow them to prosper in their selfish endeavors.*

ASK: What was the result of his message? (Q11) *The Lord used Haggai’s message to stir up the people to work on rebuilding the temple.*

ASK: Why is a desire to glorify God such a necessary quality in a spiritual leader? (Q12) *A desire to glorify God keeps a leader from being satisfied with mediocrity and prevents the leader from leading for selfish reasons.*

C. Disrepair (1:3)

Hanani's report included a reference to Jerusalem being "broken down" (1:3). Was Hanani's report just a rehearsal of what happened to Jerusalem in 586 BC when the walls and gates were breached and the temple burned by the Babylonians? Most likely not, for Nehemiah had a strong response to Hanani's report, suggesting he hadn't heard the news before (1:4).

From the book of Ezra, we can conclude that Hanani's report referenced a more recent breaking down of Jerusalem's walls. Ezra, in the book that bears his name, included a list of oppositions to making progress in rebuilding the temple and walls in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:6–23). The opposition under Artaxerxes I king of Persia is most likely the news that discouraged Nehemiah (4:7–23). Artaxerxes I reigned from 465–425 BC.

During Artaxerxes's reign, the repatriated Jews in Jerusalem went further than the edict of Cyrus (538 BC) had allowed and began rebuilding the city walls instead of just the temple. When their enemies, Samaritans named Rehum and Shimshai, came to realize this, they alerted king Artaxerxes I. They wrote a letter to the king, warning him that a rebuilt city would doubtless be a threat to his power (4:12–16). Artaxerxes I sent a letter in reply, forcing the Jews to stop rebuilding until he issued any additional directions (4:21). Emboldened, the Samaritans went beyond the intentions of the king's letter and mounted an attack upon the Jews, destroying the newly rebuilt sections of the Jerusalem wall (4:23). The loss likely drained the Jewish settlers of all hope and robbed them of a significant portion of their resources.

The news of this more recent devastation in Jerusalem moved Nehemiah to tears and prayer for his people. He certainly encountered "troublesome times" as Daniel 9:25 predicted. God's temple and people were left seemingly defenseless.

ASK: Of what did the broken walls remind the Jews? (Q13) *Their disobedience and God's just punishment.*

ASK: In what way were the broken walls a symbol of what needed to happen to Jerusalem's leaders and people? What "walls" in their lives needed to be broken down for the rebuilding of the physical walls to begin? (Q14) *The leaders and people needed to break down the walls of their disbelief and selfish living in order to begin to rebuild the physical walls. They needed broken hearts before the Lord.*

Nehemiah could have easily ignored his homeland. After all, he enjoyed the comforts of palace life in Persia. His love for God and God's people, however, prevented him from adopting such an insensitive response. His heart ached for God's people and God's name. In the coming accounts, we will learn that he risked his life to restore both to their former glory. Of course, God proved faithful once again as He responded to Nehemiah's deep faith.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

ASK: Name some people who look to you as a spiritual leader. (Q15)

ASK: What do your efforts as a spiritual leader say about the level of concern you have for those who look to you for leadership? (Q16)

ASK: How do your efforts as a spiritual leader reflect on God's name? Do your actions glorify God? In what ways? (Q17)

Increasing Concerns

RESOURCE: Display resource 3. **ASK:** What are some ways we could increase our concern for those we are responsible for leading? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q18)

ASK: What are some ways we could increase our concern for God's name and reputation? (Record or reveal answers.) (Q19)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Record or review the response for this lesson: Show concern for the people you lead.

Encourage your learners to memorize Psalm 61:2. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

Concern for Those You Lead
Increase Concern for Others

Increase Concern for God's Name

Marks of a Spiritual Leader

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