



### **THE HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF NEHEMIAH**

In the late 600s BC, the major power in the Mideast was Babylon, in the area now occupied by Iraq. With their powerful army, they swept through the region. In the year 586 BC, they conquered Jerusalem and took many of the Jews captive, transporting them to Babylon.

But in 539 BC, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, who took over their empire. The Persians were a kinder, gentler empire, and their policy was to let captive people return to their homelands and as a result, a number of Jews returned to Judah, while others stayed where they were. Many of the captive Jews had settled into their new homes in Babylon and Persia. Some, like Daniel (and later Esther, and Nehemiah) attained positions of prominence there.

Decades went by, with some Jews firmly rooted in Persia and others back in Judah, struggling to reclaim their land. In 458 BC, Ezra led a group back to Judah to kick-start the rebuilding effort. The book of Nehemiah begins a dozen years after that (445 BC) in the city of Susa, capital of Persia, where Nehemiah had a position in the royal court.

### **IS NEHEMIAH RELEVANT FOR JESUS FOLLOWERS TODAY?**

Nehemiah details the story of a man who had a heart that broke for the things that God's heart broke for. But that is just the beginning of the story. The book of Nehemiah also details Nehemiah's response to his circumstances, his surrender to God, and the ways in which he courageously led his people.

Nehemiah details the story of a people who weren't willing to settle for the status quo in circumstances that they themselves didn't create; but even in the midst of these circumstances, they chose to be unified around God and His purposes regardless of the costs involved.

Nehemiah is a book of action. Conviction isn't enough for God's people. So, as we journey through the book of Nehemiah, we will be challenged to explore whether or not we are going to be committed to rise and build for the sake of the kingdom of Jesus, regardless of opposition, regardless of circumstances, and yes, even regardless of ourselves.

Above all else, Nehemiah is the story of God who enables, empowers, and strengthens His people to rise and build for the sake of His Name and not their own.

## NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 1 (FACILITATOR)

### Discussion Starter

- What is one thing that annoyed you this past week and how did you respond?
- **Opening Prayer**
  - Ask if someone wants to volunteer before leading the prayer.

### Tell the Story

- **PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE ONE PERSON WHO STORIES (SUMMARIZES THE CHAPTER) BEFORE THE GROUP READS THE CHAPTER TOGETHER.**

### Read the Story (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

Read out loud as a group, 3-5 verses per person. Let everyone know they can opt out if they would like.

### Breaking it Down

- All questions should be utilized as appropriate based upon group dynamics to facilitate both understanding and discussion. Don't feel tied to the questions and don't feel like you have to get through every question. Follow the Spirit's lead! All questions are a matter of perspective in some way BUT there are specific questions that this is truer of and these questions have been indicated to be perspective/opinion questions.

### Nehemiah 1:1-3

- What is the significance of a city wall and its gates?
  - The wall was a city's **security** the gates were a city's **society**. With a sturdy city wall, you could basically close up the city at night and sleep in peace. Without it, the whole city was at risk. City gates were not only the entry points, but also centers of government and commerce. This was where society functioned. With the city gates burned, the city was hardly a city anymore.
- Why would broken-down walls have taken on even more significance for the city of Jerusalem?
  - For Jerusalem, the broken-down walls were even more significant because they were God's chosen people BUT they had gone into exile and this exile was both difficult and shameful. The people of God who were supposed to most reflect and show God were in absolutely terrible shape.

- What are some ways in which we see “broken down walls” in our world today from a spiritual standpoint?
  - This is a perspective and opinion question so please listen as the facilitator.

### **Nehemiah 1:4-11**

- How would you characterize Nehemiah’s reaction to the broken-down walls?
  - This is a perspective and opinion question so please listen as the facilitator.
    - Why is Nehemiah’s reaction even more surprising considering the following?
      - He was cupbearer to the king...which meant, his was tasting the wine for the king to make sure it was poisoned, etc. In other words, he was living in luxury. For him to actually care about something taking place when his life was going fairly smoothly testifies to his heart and character.
      - He was 800 miles away from Jerusalem and yet, his heart was broken for his people and their circumstances. He didn’t allow himself to be disengaged and unaffected just because he was far away from them.
- How would you characterize your reactions to the “broken down walls” that you see around you as a man or woman of God?
  - This is an opinion and perspective question so please listen as the facilitator.
- How would you describe Nehemiah’s prayer?
  - What does his prayer indicate about his character?
  - What does his prayer indicate about his understanding of God?
  - What does his prayer indicate about his relationship with God?
  - If you’re in a place where your heart and mind aren’t burdened for the same things that God’s heart is, how can this change?

- What are you committed to building as a Jesus follower?
  - These are perspective and opinion questions so please listen as the facilitator.

### **Final Application**

- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What does this passage teach us about mankind?
- What is a command to obey in this passage?
- What has God revealed in your life that needs changing?
- What truth can be applied to your life about the gospel?

### **Closing & Prayer Requests**

- Have a designated person to capture and share (as appropriate) within the life group.
- What happens in life group, stays in life group.
- Don't forget get to confirm the next meeting date and time
- Also recruit someone to do the story for the following week (Nehemiah Chapter 2)



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