

INTRODUCTION

The nation of Israel and the Jewish people were in a desperate state. After being held in captivity for 70 years, they were given the opportunity to return to their homeland. Only about 50,000 returned, and in the days of Ezra, they rebuilt the temple. Nehemiah begins 15 years after Ezra ends; though the temple was rebuilt, the walls of Jerusalem were still in rubble. When Nehemiah asked his brother about the status of Jerusalem and heard the report, he wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed. After seeking wisdom from God, he developed a plan for the rebuilding. But because he knew that very few things of significance within the Kingdom of God happen alone, he knew he needed the people of Israel to own their influence.

SCRIPTURE

¹The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, ²Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. ³They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." ⁴When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:1-4) ¹In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, ²so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, ³but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" ⁴The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, ⁵and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it." ⁶Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. (Nehemiah 2:1-6) ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. ¹⁷Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." ¹⁸I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. (Nehemiah 2:16-18) ⁶So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. ⁷But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. (Nehemiah 4:6-8) ¹⁵So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever tried to tackle a big project on your own? What was the result?
2. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4. What is the news Nehemiah hears, and what is his response? What does his response tell you about his character?
3. Read Nehemiah 2:1-6. Approximately four months passed since Nehemiah heard the news about Jerusalem, and he was still burdened by it. His conversation with the king indicated that he had put a good deal of thought and prayer into the matter. Has God revealed anything to you that caused you to be burdened (for our church, our city, our world)? If so, what have you done about it?

Study Questions for Community Groups

- 4. Read Nehemiah 2:16-18. Why do you think Nehemiah waited to share his purpose for being in Jerusalem?

- 5. Read through Nehemiah 3. Note the various kinds of people who are doing the work. Discuss any individuals or groups that stand out.

- 6. Which group of people are called out for not participating in the work? What does this say about everybody doing their part?

- 7. The list in Nehemiah 3 indicates a group of ordinary people doing the work of God together. One of the statements made in the “This Is Fellowship” video on Sunday was that *“Our church is built on the sacrifices of many, not the talent of a few. We find it to be our greatest joy to serve and lead in team to open the way for others to experience Jesus.”* Are you allowing God to use you as part of Fellowship’s team? If not, why not?

- 8. Read Nehemiah 6:15-16. What do you learn about the concept of everyone owning their own influence?

APPLICATION

Think through what it means to own you influence. Brainstorm with your group ways you can do this here at Fellowship.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- 1. When Nehemiah arrived and rallied the Israelites left in the land to help build Jerusalem’s wall, he experienced intense opposition. Fill out the chart below with what the opposition was and what Nehemiah’s response was. What do you learn from these responses?

PASSAGE	OPPOSITION (NAMES/THREATS)	RESPONSE
Nehemiah 4:1-6		
Nehemiah 4:7-23		
Nehemiah 6:1-14		

- 2. What is your first response to opposition? What does your response say about the depth of your faith in God?

- 3. Read John 15:18-20 and 2 Timothy 3:12. What do these verses say a Christ-follower should expect? How will you prepare for this?

- 4. Read 1 Peter 2:18-23. What does Peter encourage as a response to opposition?