



# Community Group Discussion Guide

February 1, 2026

## Nehemiah 1:1-11; 6:1-16 | Rebuilding and Restoration

### MOTIVATE

⇒ *Starter Question: What are some of your favorite renovation and restorations shows? Why do you like this content?*

### DISCUSS

In previous weeks, we discovered God's hand at work even as the people of Israel lived through exile as a result of their disobedience to Him. Upon their return, God worked through His people as they rebuilt the temple. Nehemiah was tasked with restoring the defensive wall around Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's story begins in the month of Chislev (November-December) during the twentieth year of the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was in Susa, a royal fortress city of the Medo-Persian Empire, located in modern-day Iran. Nehemiah, whose name means "the Lord comforts," was an Israelite living in exile who had been appointed to be the king's cupbearer, a highly honored role that allowed him close access to the king.

⇒ *How does it show God's providence that Nehemiah came to such a position of influence?*

In Nehemiah 1:1-11, Nehemiah received a troubling report from the Israelites who had returned to the land as God promised. Nehemiah prayed for the opportunity to do something about it, and was allowed to do so in Nehemiah 6:1-16. The book of Nehemiah complements the book of Ezra. Whereas Ezra was concerned with spiritually bringing God's people back to obedience of the Law of Moses, Nehemiah focused on physically rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah (which may have first been composed as one book) cover roughly a one-hundred-year time span of Israel a few centuries before Christ's birth. At the time, Israel had been under the rule of foreign nations for seventy years. As a result, their identity as a nation was in shambles, their optimism had vanished, and the people were in disarray. The situation was desperate.

⇒ *What should be our response when a situation is desperate?*

Note: This is a helpful timeline for this week's study:

- The first group of Jews returns and rebuilds the Temple (Ezra 1–6).
- Esther and Mordecai rescue God's people from destruction (Esther 1–10).
- Ezra the priest returns to Judah and instructs the people in the Law (Ezra 7–10).
- Nehemiah returns and rebuilds the wall around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1–6).
- Ezra reads the Book of the Law in celebration (Nehemiah 8).

### 1. Nehemiah 1:1-11: With repentance comes restoration.

**Nehemiah 1:1-4:** <sup>1</sup> *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel, <sup>2</sup> that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> And they said to me, "The remnant there in the*

*province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”<sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.*

Nehemiah received a visit from a group of men which included his brother. These men had traveled 700 miles from Judah. Nehemiah questioned the men regarding the Jewish community living in Judah, as well as questions about Jerusalem. He learned that the Jews in Jerusalem were facing hardships and humiliation from non-Jewish settlers who were living in the area. In addition, Jerusalem’s defenses—her walls and gates—remained in ruins, despite that fact that the returning Jews had lived in the city for more than ninety years. With no city walls, the people were vulnerable to the enemies around them. After hearing about the distressing condition, Nehemiah turned to prayer and fasting before God, weeping and mourning for days.

- ⇒ *What is your first reaction when you hear distressing news?*
- ⇒ *Why is prayer often the last resort and not our first response?*
- ⇒ *When was the last time you wept over the condition of God’s people?*

**Nehemiah 1:5-10:** *<sup>5</sup> And I said, "O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. <sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.*

Nehemiah began his prayer by praising God and acknowledging His character. Nehemiah called to mind the covenant God made with the Israelites. Nehemiah recalled how on multiple occasions during their forty-year trek through the desert, God reminded the Israelites that one of the consequences for not upholding their part of the covenant would be exile from the promised land (Leviticus 26:27-33; Deuteronomy 28:58-68). Nehemiah admitted to God that both he and his ancestors had acted in a way that was undeserving of any gift of God’s love. Instead of demonstrating obedience to God, he and generations of other Israelites had acted wickedly and rebelliously, refusing to follow God’s Word given to Moses.

- ⇒ *Nehemiah lived under the old covenant, and believers today live under the new covenant. Does our disobedience today still bring consequences?*
- ⇒ *When have you faced consequences for your sin, and how did God lead you back to Him?*

Deuteronomy 28 contains intense curses for the Israelites’ disobedience, but Deuteronomy 30:1-10 shows God’s heart behind the punishment: to bring His people back to Him and bless them. Nehemiah knew this, and his prayer reflected his trust in God’s faithfulness. To begin the restoration process, Nehemiah acknowledged the people’s sins as well as his own. Repentance is a response to God’s grace. It includes a genuine sorrow for sin, a turning away from sin, and a life that reflects

lasting change and transformation. Though God had restored the people to their land, the restoration wasn't yet complete. Nehemiah petitioned God to act.

- ⇒ *What does Nehemiah's prayer tell us about repentance?*
- ⇒ *What does Nehemiah's prayer tell us about the character of God?*
- ⇒ *Discuss this statement: Our faith is grounded in who God is and our prayers must be based on God's revealed character.*

The same God faithful in carrying out His judgment is also faithful in reconciling and restoring His people. In verse 10, Nehemiah recalled that Israel was "redeemed" by God. The verb used here is the strongest possible affirmation that a ransom price had been paid on Israel's behalf.

**Nehemiah 1:11:** *<sup>11</sup> O LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." Now I was cupbearer to the king.*

In a posture of humility, Nehemiah pleaded with God to grant him success and compassion in the presence of King Artaxerxes. At the time, Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, his most trusted servant and official. Nehemiah oversaw the king's food services to ensure his meals were not poisoned. He often was by the king's side for counsel.

Nehemiah's request, made in Nehemiah 2, could be met with favor or looked upon with suspicion. The request could have led to Nehemiah's death. Nehemiah relied on God. God not only moved in the heart of Nehemiah but providentially put Nehemiah in the proper place so that he could accomplish his purposes. Nehemiah was preparing to leverage his position on behalf of his people and ultimately for God's exaltation. God worked again in the heart of a pagan king to fulfill His work among His people.

- ⇒ *Why is it important to note that God worked again through a pagan king? How do we apply this today?*

In Nehemiah 2-5, King Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem to help his people, but some surrounding leaders became angry. Nehemiah and a team of Israelite families began rebuilding the wall, but they were halted for a time by opposition before they could resume building. Nehemiah 5 paints a picture of Nehemiah's servant leadership and his efforts to end the oppression of the poor in Jerusalem.

- ⇒ *Why is there always opposition to God's work? What should be our response?*

## **2. Nehemiah 6:1-16: God will restore His people to reveal His glory and sovereignty.**

**Nehemiah 6:1-3:** *Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates), <sup>2</sup> Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. <sup>3</sup> And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?"*

In Nehemiah 6, three named officials, amongst many others, opposed Nehemiah. These officials were greatly displeased with Nehemiah's aims and charged Nehemiah with "rebellious against the king" (Nehemiah 2:10). The three were:

- Sanballat, the governor of Syria (northwest of Judah).
- Tobiah, a government official in Ammon (northeast of Judah).
- Geshem the Arab, who was from Moab and/or Edom (southeast of Judah).

These foreign leaders opposed Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's wall from the beginning. As Jerusalem grew in strength, these three men would lose power and control in the region. In Nehemiah 6, as they realized the wall was nearing completion, they made a last-ditch effort to stop the work by going after Nehemiah personally, hoping to thwart his plans. If they took down Nehemiah, they would take down the work.

First, they attempted to isolate Nehemiah from his allies by inviting him to the plain of Ono, 27 miles from the city. Nehemiah, however, discerned their intent to harm him and said, "I cannot come down." Nehemiah recognized their deceit and refused to be intimidated.

⇒ *What are some ways Christians can respond confidently and graciously to intimidation or false accusations?*

**Nehemiah 6:4-9:** *<sup>4</sup> And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. <sup>5</sup> In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. <sup>6</sup> In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. <sup>7</sup> And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, 'There is a king in Judah.' And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together." <sup>8</sup> Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind." <sup>9</sup> For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done." But now, O God, strengthen my hands.*

Unable to draw Nehemiah away from the work site, Sanballat sent him a message with a juicy rumor. A letter in Nehemiah's day usually would be sealed so that the message could only be read by the intended recipient. Yet this was an unsealed letter, indicating Sanballat wanted to spread his insinuations to everyone.

This time, Sanballat decided to incite fear in Nehemiah that these false reports of insurrection would get back to Persia and anger King Artaxerxes. These accusations were serious because the Israelites had a history of rebelling against kings (2 Kings 24:1, 20). It also was tricky for kingdoms like Persia to control everyone in their empire. The best threats are plausible because they legitimize the potential of worst-case scenario. Nehemiah confronted Sanballat, recognizing his attempt to turn the people against him: "No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind."

⇒ *Why is opposition common in leadership?*

⇒ *Why is it difficult to focus on God's call when opposition occurs?*

Nehemiah understood that Sanballat's attempts to intimidate him were another way the enemy would distract him from the main work God had called him to do. Nehemiah had nothing to gain from granting their request. Rather than engaging in their false accusations or halting his work, Nehemiah responded firmly and truthfully. Instead of entering into a debate or attempting to prove the men wrong, he prayed, "But now, O God, strengthen my hands." Nehemiah knew he was doing what was right, but he also knew he could not stand in his own strength.

⇒ *Why should a response like Nehemiah's also be our response when the evil one attempts to frighten us from obediently following the will of God?*

**Nehemiah 6:10-14:** <sup>10</sup> Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night." <sup>11</sup> But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in." <sup>12</sup> And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. <sup>13</sup> For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. <sup>14</sup> Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

Sanballat had some allies among the Jews. One key Jewish opponent to Nehemiah was Shemaiah, an individual who was apparently both a priest and a prophet. When Nehemiah visited Shemaiah in his home, Shemaiah suggested that they seek refuge by locking themselves inside the temple to protect Nehemiah from his adversaries. Such a move on Nehemiah's part would have disrupted his task of overseeing the rebuilding project. Nehemiah also recognized that entering the temple to hide from his enemies would be sinful, and as a result he would be discredited. Nehemiah was not a priest, so to enter the temple would go against God's commands (Numbers 18:7). Additionally, to enter the temple as a hiding place would demonstrate lack of faith in God's protection against Nehemiah's enemies.

⇒ *Nehemiah left his enemies and vengeance against them in God's hands. What application can you make from Nehemiah's willingness to do this?*

⇒ *How can you be faithful to God's call in this season, even if someone or something opposes you?*

**Nehemiah 6:15-16:** <sup>15</sup> So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. <sup>16</sup> And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Miraculously, the basic defensive wall around Jerusalem, one that had lain in ruins for more than 140 years, was rebuilt in only fifty-two days. This incredible feat, accomplished in spite of threats and plots mounted against the builders, served as a major defeat for the enemies of God's people. Jews and non-Jews alike who had tried to stop the rebuilding recognized that the project was completed with God's help. The enemy stood no chance against God's power and His people's obedience.

Nehemiah remained faithful to the task God set before him, unshaken by repeated obstacles and

opposition. As a result of Nehemiah's dependence on God, the wall was finished, and God blessed Nehemiah's efforts and glorified His own name. Restoring and returning the Israelites back to Jerusalem reflects God's heart in wanting to be with His people.

- ⇒ *How does Nehemiah's prayer and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall reveal God's character and commitment to restore His people?*
- ⇒ *How does our restoration through Christ demonstrate to the world that God is sovereign, at work, and desires all people to come to Him?*

## **TRANSFORM**

Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and asked God to bless the work of the people as they sought to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked for God's blessing not because of the people's goodness or faithfulness but based on God's covenant with them. God's favor was on the people as they built the wall despite serious opposition from neighboring rulers. As a result, the surrounding nations saw God's glory and sovereign care over Israel.

1. HEAD: Today, we constantly face individualism, tribalism, difficult personal decisions, and distressing world events. We know God's character from Scripture, but we're so quick to forget His faithfulness. One of the most notable things about Nehemiah is how many times he turned to prayer before speaking, acting, or making decisions, even when his life was threatened.

- ⇒ *Why is it important that you turn to God before acting or reacting to troubling events?*

2. HEART: Nehemiah's opponents tried to intimidate the Jews to thwart their plans. Their dislike became anger and then threats. Nehemiah was unshaken, not by his own power but by constantly remembering God's faithfulness. Nehemiah's heart, words, and actions reflected his trust in God's character. God rewarded his efforts by protecting the Jews and letting the wall be completed, resulting in His own glory.

- ⇒ *How can you, like Nehemiah, rest in God's continuing faithfulness?*

3. HANDS: Because of Nehemiah's humility, faithfulness, and leadership, some consider him a type of Christ. Both were in the work of restoration; both exemplified humility and faithfulness. Both confronted opposition. Jesus, however, is our ultimate restorer, foregoing His rights as God and dying a humiliating death for our redemption and restoration (Philippians 2:5-11).

- ⇒ *How will you reflect humility and faithfulness this week?*

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Additional resource: *Shepherd's Notes, Ezra/Nehemiah*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN (1999), pages 49-52, 67-71.