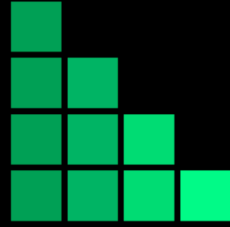


NEW LIFE ONE STUDIES



Series: “Nehemiah: Rise & Build”

Week 1 Study Guide

Message: “Ruins”

SCRIPTURE

Main Text:	Cross References:
<i>Nehemiah 1</i>	<i>God's Faithfulness & Covenant</i> <i>Deuteronomy 28:1–68</i> <i>Deuteronomy 30:1–10</i> <i>Nehemiah 1:5, 8–9</i> <i>Seeing God & Seeing Ourselves</i> <i>Isaiah 6:1–8</i> <i>Nehemiah 1:5–7</i> <i>Repentance → Restoration</i> <i>Romans 5:8</i> <i>1 John 1:9</i> <i>Nehemiah 1:8–9</i>

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

*(This section focuses on understanding what the text means —
before jumping to what it means for us.)*

Read Nehemiah 1:1–4

Main Idea: Nehemiah sees that the ruins of Jerusalem reveal a deeper brokenness among God's people.

Commentary:

Nehemiah opens in Susa, the Persian capital, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes. Jerusalem had been destroyed by Babylon roughly 140 years earlier, and although some Jewish exiles had already returned and the temple had been rebuilt, Jerusalem remained vulnerable. When Nehemiah asks about the Jewish remnant and the city, the answer is devastating: the people are in great trouble and disgrace, the wall is broken down, and the gates have been burned. In the ancient world, a city's walls weren't merely architectural—they represented protection, stability, identity, and strength. A city without walls was exposed and vulnerable.

But Nehemiah's response is striking. He doesn't immediately develop a construction plan or start looking for resources. He sits down, weeps, mourns, fasts, and prays. He understands that the ruins are not simply a construction problem. Israel's physical condition is connected to a much deeper spiritual history: God's people had repeatedly turned away from Him, and the consequences God had warned them about in Deuteronomy had become reality. Nehemiah allows the brokenness to break his heart before he tries to fix anything.

Also see: Deuteronomy 28:15–37 — God's warning about the consequences of Israel's unfaithfulness.

Also see: Deuteronomy 30:1–3 — God's promise of restoration when His people return to Him.

Discussion Questions:

1. What exactly does Nehemiah learn about Jerusalem and the people living there?
2. Why do you think Nehemiah responds with weeping, mourning, fasting, and prayer?
3. What does Nehemiah's response suggest about how he understands the relationship between Jerusalem's physical condition and the spiritual condition of God's people?

Takeaway:

Sometimes the things that are broken on the outside are revealing something deeper underneath.

Read Nehemiah 1:5–7

Main Idea: A right view of God produces humility.

Commentary:

Notice where Nehemiah begins: with God. Before he talks about Jerusalem, its ruins, or Israel's failure, he describes the LORD as the “God of heaven,” great and awesome, who keeps covenant and steadfast love. The Hebrew idea of **hesed** points to God's loyal, steadfast covenant love. Nehemiah's understanding of Israel's failure is framed by God's character: God is holy and faithful even when His people are not. Seeing God rightly gives Nehemiah the ability to see Israel's condition honestly.

Then comes confession. Nehemiah repeatedly says “we” have sinned. He doesn't separate himself from Israel's failure or simply blame the generations that came before him: “I and my father's house have sinned.” He stands inside the brokenness rather than above it. This is a picture of genuine repentance. Instead of asking only, “Who

caused this?” Nehemiah is willing to ask, “Where have we gone wrong before God?” Restoration begins when we stop defending, minimizing, or blaming and allow God's holiness to expose what is really happening in our hearts.

See also: Isaiah 6:1–8 — Isaiah encounters God's holiness and becomes aware of his own uncleanness.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Nehemiah describe God at the beginning of his prayer?
2. Why is it significant that Nehemiah says “we” have sinned rather than simply blaming previous generations?
3. What does Nehemiah's confession reveal about the kind of heart that is ready for renewal?

Takeaway:

A right view of God helps us see ourselves honestly. Before renewal comes repentance.

Read Nehemiah 1:8–9

Main Idea: Nehemiah's confession is grounded in the hope that God restores people who return to Him.

Commentary:

Nehemiah's prayer is deeply rooted in the promises God gave Israel through Moses. Deuteronomy 28 had warned that persistent disobedience would bring devastating consequences, including exile. But Deuteronomy 30 had also promised that exile would not be the end. If God's people returned to Him, God would gather, restore, and renew them. Nehemiah is reading the present ruins through the lens of God's larger covenant story. Their circumstances are evidence that

God's warnings were true—but they are not evidence that God's faithfulness has failed.

The turning point is verse 9: “But if you return to me...” Biblical repentance is more than feeling guilty or regretting what we've done. It is turning back toward God. Nehemiah's hope isn't that Israel will somehow become good enough to deserve another chance. His hope is in the character of the God who keeps covenant and shows steadfast love. The same God who is holy and just and confronts sin, is faithful to receive us when we turn back to Him. That's why confession doesn't have to end in shame — it opens the door to restoration.

See also: Romans 5:8 — God demonstrates His love for sinners through Christ.

See also: 1 John 1:9 — God is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse those who confess.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Nehemiah remember about God's instructions to Israel?
2. What hope does verse 9 give to people who have failed God?
3. Why is it important that Nehemiah's hope is based on God's faithfulness rather than Israel's ability to fix itself?
4. In what ways do you see a parallel between this story, and God's promises fulfilled in Jesus?

Takeaway:

Repentance isn't the end of the story. Because God is faithful, failure can be met with forgiveness and restoration when we turn back to Him.

Read Nehemiah 1:10–11

Main Idea: Nehemiah brings the burden of the ruins before God and becomes willing to respond when God opens the way.

Commentary:

Nehemiah closes his prayer by remembering that Israel is God's redeemed people and by asking God to hear his prayer and grant him favor with King Artaxerxes. There is an important time gap here: Nehemiah 1 begins in Kislev, while chapter 2 begins in Nisan—roughly four months later. This wasn't a momentary emotional reaction. Nehemiah carried this burden before God for months. He prayed, mourned, confessed, remembered God's promises, and waited.

That matters because prayer doesn't always change the circumstances immediately. Sometimes God first changes the way we see the circumstances and prepares our hearts to respond faithfully. Nehemiah eventually asks for favor because he understands that if the ruins are going to be addressed, he will need to step into the situation himself. He doesn't yet know how the story will unfold, but he knows who God is and what God has promised. Before he has a plan for rebuilding Jerusalem, he has learned to place the burden in God's hands.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Nehemiah continue doing with the burden God has placed on his heart?
2. What does the length of time between chapters 1 and 2 tell us about Nehemiah's response?

3. How might prayer have changed Nehemiah before it ever changed his circumstances?
4. What does Nehemiah's willingness to ask the king for favor reveal about his readiness to respond?

Takeaway:

Sometimes God uses prayer to prepare us to respond faithfully to the circumstances He has placed before us.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Nehemiah's story forces us to look beneath the surface.

We all have ruins—places where something isn't the way it should be. Sometimes those ruins are obvious. Other times we've become really good at managing them, hiding them, or explaining them.

But Nehemiah shows us a different response. Instead of asking only: “How do I fix this?” we can begin asking: “God, what are You showing me?”

Reflection Questions:

1. What “ruins” or areas of brokenness do you recognize in your life right now?
2. What might those ruins be revealing about what is happening underneath—in your heart, your relationship with God, or your relationships with others?
3. Is there an area where you've been more focused on fixing the circumstances than allowing God to search your heart?

4. What would it look like for you to bring that brokenness honestly to God instead of trying to manage it yourself?
 5. Where do you need to remember: *"I have failed—but God has promised"*?
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LIVING IT OUT

Restoration begins with bringing the ruins to God. This week, take some intentional time to pray through Nehemiah 1.

Action Steps:

1. **Name the Ruins** — Identify brokenness in and around your life that needs God's restoration.
2. **Search Your Heart** — What might be underneath the thing you're seeing on the surface? Reflect honestly and ask the Spirit of God to search you.
3. **Confess** where you have sinned, and own it honestly before God.
4. **Remember His Faithfulness** — Spend time remembering who God is:
He is faithful.
His love is steadfast.
He forgives.
He restores.
His promises stand even when we fail.
5. **Trust Him With the Next Step**
God is the master builder. You don't have to know how everything will be restored — but trust that He will do it! Surrender your future to the Lord in prayer.

For LifeGroups:

ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER

Share

What is one area of your life where you need God to bring restoration?

What has God been showing you about what might be underneath that situation?

Where is it difficult for you to admit your own part in something that's broken?

What promise or truth about God's character do you need to hold onto right now?

Pray Together

Ask God to:

Give us courage to honestly acknowledge our brokenness.

Search our hearts rather than allowing us to focus only on everyone else's problems.

Give us genuine repentance where we've drifted from Him.

Help us trust His faithfulness when we feel overwhelmed by our failures.

Begin rebuilding what is broken within us before asking Him to rebuild what is broken around us.