



## **Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"**

### **Session 1: Context**

#### **Introduction**

Context is everything. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah come alive when we can understand the history and relationship of God and the Israelites. This week, we will look back to remember where the Israelites have been, where they are in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and where God is leading them.

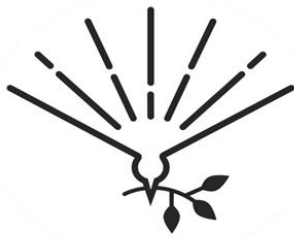
A covenant is a contract between God and his people. God is a covenant keeping God, and the Israelites, like us, tend to be a covenant breaking people. We will see a God whose love for his people is so great that despite repeated disobedience, won't give up on His promises.

On Day Four, we will look into Ezra and Nehemiah. The Hebrew bible considered these books as one, and it wasn't until the third century A.D that Origen suggested it be considered two separate books. Together, Ezra and Nehemiah expose the final chapter in the historic narrative of the Hebrew Bible.

#### **Questions:**

Why is context important?

R.C. Sproul said, "We are secure not because we hold tightly to Jesus, but because He holds tightly to us." What does this statement have to do with Old Testament covenant? Does this seem like a 'equal' agreement between the two parties? Why, why not?



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## **Day One: God's promises and the Israelite people**

See Genesis 12:1-2 and 15:5. What promises does God make Abram?

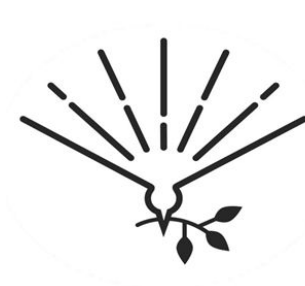
Read Genesis 35:10-13. God chose to give Abraham's descendant, Jacob, a new name. What new name does God choose, and what implications does it have for his descendants who will follow?

See Genesis 15:13. What does God tell Abraham about the future of his descendants?

Roughly 400 years after Abraham, God chose to raise Moses as a leader of the Israelites. What can we learn about the relationship between God and the Israelites in Exodus 6: 2-8?

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, and for forty years they wandered in the desert, before they reached the promise land. During this time, God gave them the Mosaic law. See Deuteronomy 4:1-8. What instructions does God give the Israelites through Moses?

The Israelites seem to waffle between periods of obedience and disobedience. When times are good, because they have obeyed God, they seem to forget all about God's rule and turn to living according to their own. Their disobedience then leads to an understanding that they need God, and hearts that turn back toward Him. How is this cycle familiar to you? What promises of God can you remember in times of disobedience?



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## **Day Two: Exile**

What happened to Jerusalem in 605 BC (Daniel 1:1-2)? Based on Daniel 1:6, what is Daniel's connection to this event (Daniel 1:6)?

Again, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, and the city fell to Babylon in 586 BC. What do we learn about this event from 2 Kings 25: 8-12?

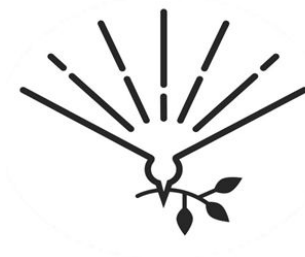
The prophet Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. What message does God provide through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 27:6-7)?

What explanation does Ezra provide for the cause of the fall of Jerusalem? See Ezra 5:12.

## **Day Three: Persians conquer Babylon**

Belshazzar succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as the ruler of Babylon. However, in 539 BC something happened. See Daniel. What happened?

The captivity of the Israelites was ended during the reign of the Persian ruler, Cyrus. One hundred years before his birth, Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus. What can we learn about God's character through his prophesy in Isaiah 44:28?



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## **Day Four: Return**

Cyrus and Persia have new control over Babylon and the Israelite exiles. See Ezra 1:1. What does Cyrus decide to do?

This proclamation is followed by three returns to Jerusalem. We will explore them in depth in the weeks to come. In the meantime, familiarize yourself with the timeline below, and fill in the missing information.

605--Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem, takes elite captives to \_\_\_\_\_

597--Nebuchadnezzar again attacks Jerusalem, 10,000 sent to Babylon (2Kings 24:14)

596--Babylon conquers Judah, \_\_\_\_\_ is destroyed

539--\_\_\_\_\_ conquer Babylon (Daniel 5), become world power

### **536-- Zerabbabel leads first return (Ezra 1-6)**

535--construction on the Second Temple Begins

516--Second Temple is Finished and Dedicated

### **458--Ezra leads second return (Ezra 7-10)**

### **445--Nehemiah leads the third return (Nehemiah 1-3)**

445--Wall surrounding Jerusalem is completed in 52 days

In your opinion, what effect could a physical scattering of the Israelites have on their relationship with God?



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## **Day Five: Ezra and Nehemiah**

What do we know about Ezra (Ezra 7:6)?

See Ezra 7:5. Which high priest is Ezra a descendant of? Why is this mentioned and significant?

Who was Nehemiah and what roles does he fulfill? See Nehemiah 1:11, 4:1, 5:14. What kind of leadership does it take to fulfill these roles?

Read Ezra 7:10 and Nehemiah 2:5. How are their purposes similar and how do they differ?

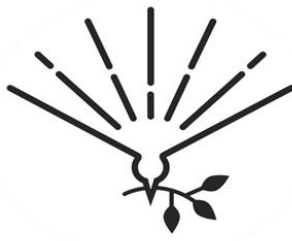
## **Day Six:**

Prayerfully consider and make a timeline of your life on the line below. Mark the physical (birth, graduations, marriage, etc.) and the spiritual milestones using the following questions:

How have you seen the movement of God? Where are the hills and valleys of your story? Where were times of spiritual exile and doubt? Where have you seen redemption and restoration? Where have you been and where are you going?

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

Where are you at right now in your journey (exile, running away from God, returning to God, spiritual growth, etc)? Wherever you may be, what steps do you need to take to pursue your relationship with God?



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## Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"

### Session 2: Ezra 1-6

#### Introduction:

The British-Somali poet, Warsan Shire, ends her poem "Home" with:

*no one leaves home until home  
is a damp voice in your ear saying  
leave, run now, i don't know what  
i've become.*

If this is home, how does one ever go back? That is a question that surely went through the minds of the Jews living in exile. Many who once called the prosperous and great nation of Judah home, spent seventy years in captivity. Yet, now they have been given the opportunity to return home.

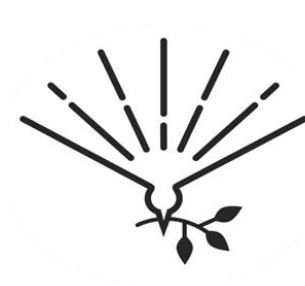
Should they stay as an oppressed people in a foreign land, which they now call home? Or should they return to the unknown and decimated home of their fathers and their God? Caught between two homes, this decision must have been a hard one to make. Yet, many of the remnant chose to return home to Judah, specifically Jerusalem.

This week, we will focus on the first of the three returns back to Judah. During the first wave, Zerubbabel led the largest group of exiles back to Judah. We will see how they had to start from scratch and quickly began work on building the altar.

#### Questions:

What characteristics make home truly "home" for you?

Psalm 91:1-2 says "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." What can be said about the relationship between home and God?



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## Day One: Decree to Return

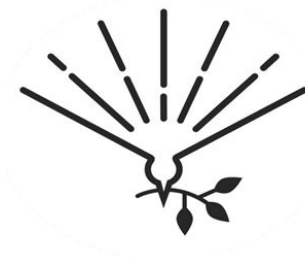
Read Ezra Chapter 1: 1-11

See Ezra 1:1. Cyrus made a proclamation in order for the prophecy of Jeremiah to be fulfilled. How was the Lord involved? What was Jeremiah's prophecy (Jeremiah 29:10)?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. It is one of the most mentioned verses in our current Christian culture. How does this understanding of the context of Jeremiah and the Jewish people amplify your understanding of this passage?

What did God compel Cyrus to do? See Ezra 1:2. Why would He choose to not go to the remnant directly?

Read Ezra 1: 7-11. King Cyrus doesn't just make a proclamation in order for the Israelites to return to Jerusalem, he also demonstrates his conviction by his actions and gives back 5,400 articles of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple (see 2 Kings 24:13). Leadership is not just lip service, it requires follow-through. Read Colossians 3:17. How can you **proclaim and demonstrate** the gospel to further the Kingdom of God?



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## **Day Two: The People**

Ezra 1-2

Read Ezra 1:5. Who is “stirred” and “moved” to go up to Jerusalem? What is significant about who is mentioned here?

Ezra first mentions Zerubbabel in Ezra 2:1. What do we know about Zerubbabel from the following texts?

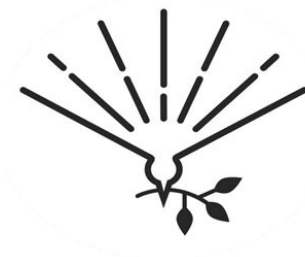
1. Matthew 1:12 \_\_\_\_\_
2. Haggai 1:1 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Zechariah 4: 9,11-14 \_\_\_\_\_

Read Ezra 2:2-64 and scan Ezra’s list of returning exiles. What conclusions can you make about who returned? What does it tell you about what they value?

See Ezra 2:64, How many people in total returned during the first wave?

Read Ezra 2: 68-70. The people gave freewill offerings according to their ability, and they returned back to their respective towns with a purpose and a mission. How is committing our time and talents to God an act of trust? See 2 Corinthians 9:7-12, in what particular areas of your life do you need to work on being a cheerful giver?





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## **Day Three: Building the Altar and Foundation**

Read Ezra 3

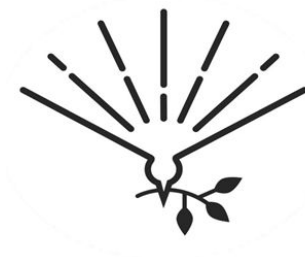
See Ezra 3:1-5. What is the first thing they do when they settled in Jerusalem, and how do they gather? What does this tell us about the position of their hearts?

In verse 4 we read that the Jews kept the Feast of Booths. See Leviticus 23:34-42. What did this observance entail?

See Ezra 3:8. Why is it important to mention that the foundation was not yet laid? What does this say about the motivation of the returned people?

See Ezra 3:11. What caused the Jews to praise God? Why was the completion of the foundation a cause for praise?

Not everyone was filled with joy. We read in verse 12 that those who had seen the former temple wept. The prophet Haggai says in Haggai 2:3, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?" Why were they weeping while others were shouting with joy?



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## **Day Four: Opposition**

Read Ezra 4

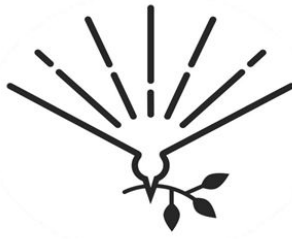
See Ezra 4:1-6. What 5 tactics did those opposed to the returned exiles employ?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

A letter sent to the king Artaxerxes was finally successful in halting work on the temple. Read through the letter (Ezra 4:11-16) and the king's response (4:17-22). How is this attempt successful where other appeals failed? What was the result?

The temple work was halted in 534 BC and began again in 520 BC. Imagine the discouragement that Zerubbabel, Jeshua and returned exiles must have faced. God provided two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them to complete the temple. Read Haggai 2:4-9. How were they being encouraged?

See 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Has God placed people in your life who encourage you toward obedience to Him? What qualities do they possess, how can you be an encouragement to someone today?



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## **Day Five: Joy**

Read Ezra 5 and 6

God urged his people to start rebuilding again. See Ezra 5:1-2. For background see Haggai 1 and Zechariah 1:1-17 and 4:1-10. What can we learn about God in these passages?

During this time, leadership came from three sources. What leadership is God providing to the people at this time? How do these three elements point to the future perfect leadership?

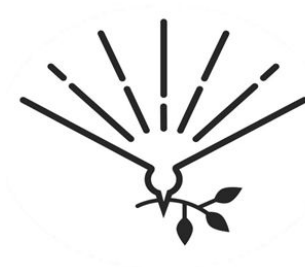
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

The decree from Cyrus is found. What does king Darius tell the governor Tattenai?

Read Ezra 6:16-18. How did the completion of the rebuilt temple compare and contrast to the completion of the first temple under King Solomon (1 Kings 8: 62-66)? When the temple was finished, what did the returned exiles do?

The people then celebrate the Feast of Passover in Ezra 6:19-22. What did they do, and why would it have been especially significant considering what they are going through (Exodus 12:1-20)?

See Ezra 6: 22, then lookup the definition of joy. What does it mean to you that the "Lord had made them joyful". What reasons do you have to be joyful?



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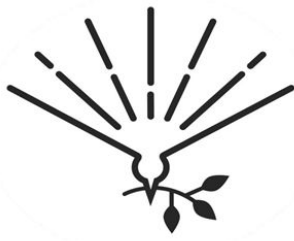
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## Day 6: Reflection

What have you learned about the character of God this week?

What about His character helps you respond to God with renewed trust?



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## Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"

### Session 3: Ezra 7-10

#### **Introduction:**

Richard J. Foster said, "To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter his gracious light." Change is good, but it is not always easy.

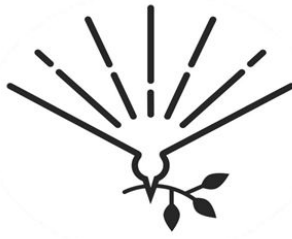
It wasn't easy for those who returned to Jerusalem either. Last week, we learned about the first return, led by Zerubbabel. We read that they completed construction of the Temple, their hearts were filled with joy as they celebrated by keeping Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Almost sixty years have passed, and this week we are introduced to Ezra in Chapter 7. He leads a smaller group from Babylon to Jerusalem almost sixty years later. While their physical location has changed, their obedience has not. They are knowingly breaking God's rules. Change needs to happen and we will see Ezra spiritually lead the people hearts back to God. Change is never easy, but when it is toward God, it is always good.

#### **Questions:**

Although many of the remnant have changed their location, they are hesitant to make the necessary changes to their hearts. Are there changes in your life that you know you need to make, but resist?

How does standing before the Holy One change you?



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## **Day One: Second Return**

Read Ezra 7:1-28

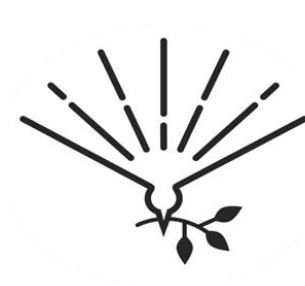
What do we learn about who Ezra is in the verses 1-7?

Why is it important that we learn through Ezra's genealogy that he is a descendant of Aaron the high priest? According to Hebrews 5:1-5, what is the role of a high priest, and who now serves as our High Priest?

According to Artaxerxes, who may go with Ezra (verses 13-14)? What will Artaxerxes provide for those who return?

What was Artaxerxes motivation for graciously supplying, providing, and encouraging Ezra on this journey?

In verses 9-10, Ezra says that he "for the gracious hand of God was on him, Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and do it and to teach his statutes for Israel." Whether we admit it or not, we all have set our hearts on something. What have you set your heart on? Do your actions support the intent of God's will on your heart? If the two aren't aligned, then are you allowing God to set your heart to bring honor to Him?



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## **Day Two: Journey**

Read Ezra 8:1- 22

During a three-day encampment, Ezra reviewed the returning exiles. What problem does Ezra identify in verse 15, how does he solve this problem? Why was it so important that Levites were present?

In verse 21, we see that as soon as Ezra has the right people in place, he proclaims a fast. What is the stated purpose of his fast?

An effective leader can admit their shortcomings. What does Ezra admit in verse 22? In what ways does shame or pride prevent you from effectively leading others toward Christ?

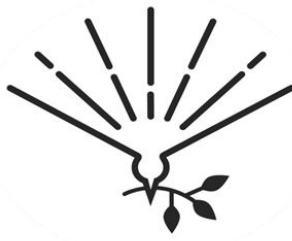
## **Day Three: Offerings**

Read Ezra 8:22-35

We have seen a variety of offerings in this week's reading. What is the difference between a freewill (Ex 35:29, Lev 22:23), burnt (Lev 1) and sin (Lev 4:1-5:13) offering? Why are offerings such an important element of Israel's relationship with God?

What is the phrase that Ezra uses 5 times in chapters 7 and 8? See 8:31. Have we seen indications that this is true? What characteristics of the hand of God have you seen in your life?

How is verse 31 a clear answer to the prayer and fasting of verse 21? How often do you gratefully acknowledge God's answers to your prayers?



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## **Day Four: Grief Over Sin**

Read Chapter 9

Chapter 9 begins with disobedience. The people of Israel have not separated themselves from their neighbors. How do their current actions differ from the instructions God gives the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:1-6?

Have you ever experienced God's grace and mercy, then later found yourself involved, trapped, or stuck in things God has set you free from before?

How does Ezra handle his grief and who shares in his grief with him (verse 3-5)? What can we learn from his faithfulness in grief?

Read verse 15. How did guilt prevent the returning exiles from standing before God? Does it still prevent us today from standing before God? If so, how?

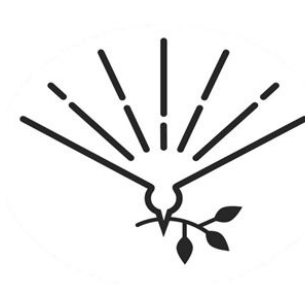
Prayer is such an integral part of leadership. How does humbling yourself before God in prayer influence your leadership of others?

## **Day Five: Bitter Weeping**

Read Ezra Chapter 10

We read that the people wept bitterly in 10:1. What was the catalyst for their weeping and confession?





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Marriage to certain foreign women were contrary to the law of God and illegal from the onset. This feels harsh from our modern perspective. How does God describe this in Deuteronomy 7:3-4?

While this does feel strange to us, the people of Israel knew these laws. See Ezra 6:21, what do we learn has changed since the first return and now?

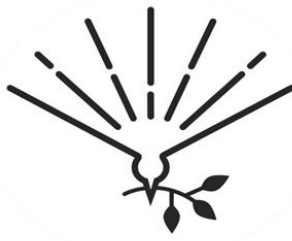
Although our circumstances are different, we can glean wisdom from Ezra's leadership. In verse 11, Ezra tells the returned exiles what they must do. What are his instructions? How can we apply these instructions for our own obedience?

What we see in Ezra Chapter 10 is a spiritual return. While Zerubbabel brought the bulk of the exiles back, a physical return, Ezra led the people's hearts back to God. What characterizes a spiritual return? Have you experienced one in your life? What steps do you need to take to return your heart to God?

## **Day 6: Reflection**

What did you learn about God this week?

How can you ask God to impact your leadership this week?



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**Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"**  
**Session 4: Effective Servant Leadership involves Prayer**

**Introduction:**

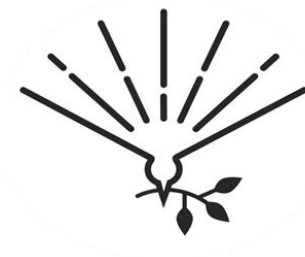
When New York City was trying to improve upon their crime and vandalism, they started with painting over graffiti. The thought was, if the subways looked cleaner, people would feel more secure and crime would be discouraged. It worked, and the problem of vandalism was brought back to a manageable level with paint. Malcom Gladwell describes this in his bestselling book *The Tipping Point*. He says that graffiti and broken windows dramatically affect the behavior of residents of a neighborhood. He suggests that there is a point where enough broken windows and graffiti can make people feel like it is okay to break more windows and deface property, which can lead to more serious crimes.

Walls are important, and Nehemiah understood this well. When he hears about the state of Jerusalem in Chapter One, his heart is broken for his people. Fueled with a God given passion to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah leads his people toward continued restoration. Through his leadership, the people of Jerusalem receive not only physical protection and security through completed walls. More than this, they receive the hope and confidence of God's ultimate protection and provision.

**Questions:**

What qualities does an effective leader embody?

We all need hope and encouragement. What hope and encouragement can you provide to someone in your life today?



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## **Day One: Broken**

Read Nehemiah Chapter 1

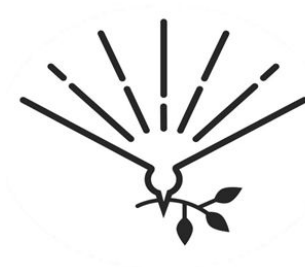
Nehemiah is deeply affected by the state of Judea and Jerusalem. What is his reaction?

We learn in verse 1 that Nehemiah was in the citadel. A citadel is defined as a “fortress, typically on high ground, protecting or dominating a city”. What does this, along with verse 11 tell us about Nehemiah’s place within his society?

Why is an un-walled city a vulnerability to its people?

We see that God has deeply convicted Nehemiah to restore this wall. Why is it important that this wall is rebuilt?

What are the walls in your life that are deteriorating? Where is God convicting you to rebuild or restore?



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## Day Two: Prayer

Re-Read Ezra 9:6-15 and Nehemiah 1:5-11

As soon as Nehemiah hears that the wall is destroyed, he doesn't try to fix the problem on his own, he first runs to God. What are the five things (verse 1:4) he does?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_
- e. \_\_\_\_\_

Why is it important that a leader run toward the heart of God?

Nehemiah's prayer is structured in four main components. What are they?

1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

1:6-7 \_\_\_\_\_

1:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

1:10 \_\_\_\_\_

What are the main components of Ezra's prayer?

1:6 \_\_\_\_\_

1:7 \_\_\_\_\_

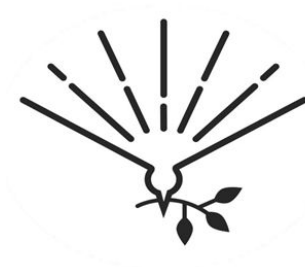
1:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

1:10-14 \_\_\_\_\_

1:15 \_\_\_\_\_

Overall, there is a theme of Ezra's prayer. What is it?

Ezra and Nehemiah were two different leaders, with two different circumstances. What qualities are similar between their prayers, what are different? What can you conclude about the relationship between prayer and godly leadership?



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## **Day Three: Prayer**

Read Nehemiah Chapter One

We can learn a lot about Nehemiah's leadership and his relationship with God in Chapter 1. What are the leadership qualities that you notice from the following verses?

1:4 \_\_\_\_\_

1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

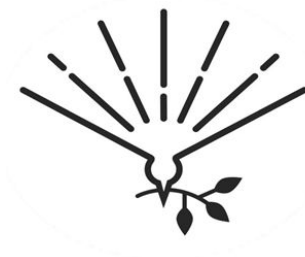
1:6-9 \_\_\_\_\_

1:10-11 \_\_\_\_\_

Nehemiah knows the promises of God. See verse 8-10. How can the knowledge of God's promises shape your prayers to God?

The first action Nehemiah takes to show compassion for his people is prayer. How is prayer a demonstration of compassion in action?

A willingness to be used by God requires faith. Which of Nehemiah's leadership qualities mentioned in question 1 are areas where your faith needs to grow?



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## **Day Four: Prayer and Action**

Read Nehemiah 2:1-8

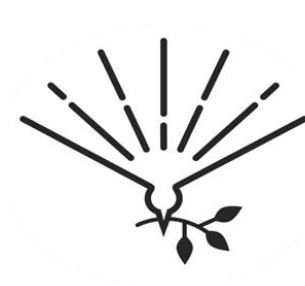
Strong relationships are integral for successful leadership. What can be inferred about the relationship between Nehemiah and the king?

In Nehemiah's conversation with the King, he stops in the middle and prays before responding. We see a leader who consults with God in the midst of decision making. See James 1:5. What is our assurance when we ask God for wisdom?

Read Proverbs 16:9. How has Nehemiah planned his course and how is God directing his steps? What does this say about prayer and action?

This is a no-win situation for the king. Why does he honor Nehemiah's request?

Nehemiah 2:1 is an answer to his prayer, but it didn't come without waiting. Four months have passed since Nehemiah's prayer in chapter 1 and his conversation with the king. How do you wait well?



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## **Day Five: Pause**

Read Nehemiah 2:9-20

Nehemiah doesn't immediately dive into the work. Instead, what does he do (see verse 11)?

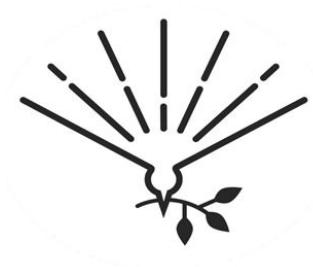
Sometimes a pause is necessary. See Mark 6:30-32. How can a pause be beneficial in servant leadership?

What does Nehemiah tell the people about the condition of the city? What must be done?

What do verses 17-20 tell us about Nehemiah's ability to fulfill this project?

Why does Nehemiah keep a low profile at first? What happened once he announced his plans?

Sometimes following Jesus requires us to stand up for our beliefs and not appease a particular people. How does Nehemiah draw the line between himself and his adversaries in verse 20? How do these words compare to those of Jesus in Luke 12:51?



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## Day 6:

What did you learn about the relationship between prayer and leadership this week?

Who are you specifically praying for this week?





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## **Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"** **Session 5: Sword and Shovel**

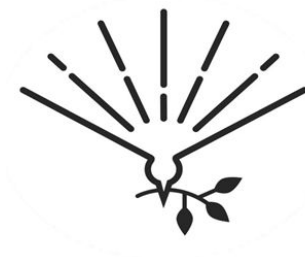
### **Introduction:**

Many things we take for granted today, are at our disposal because of the shovel and sword of the Christians who came before us. In centuries past, Christians spearheaded the fight for righteousness, establishing medical care, trade unions, prison reform, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labor and orphanages, and much more. Many organizations that have brought good to all of humanity, were established out of a desire to follow Jesus. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 6:34). While the times have changed, the charge has not. Today, we are still called to pick up our sword and shovel and serve as builders of righteousness, and defenders of truth and dignity.

This week, we will see that Nehemiah is a man who picked up both his sword and shovel. He picked up his shovel because he was sure of the necessity of the work. He had been given a vision and could not neglect to act upon the God-given vision. He was a man of the sword because he believed his work to be good. He was willing to fight for the rebuilding of the wall, for his people, his city and his God.

### **Question:**

Is there a sword and shovel that you need to pick up? A God-given vision you need to pursue? What is it?



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## **Day One: Delegation**

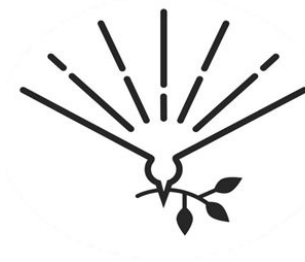
Read Nehemiah Chapter 3

Who does Nehemiah list first on his list of builders, and what is the significance of beginning the work with this man, and what does he do?

This chapter meticulously details how Nehemiah delegates the rebuilding tasks. How does he organize the work and people? What can we learn about delegation in leadership?

This is about more than a wall, as Nehemiah helps to unify a diverse group of people. See 1 Corinthians 12:11-18. What does Paul have to say about unity in the church? How does this understanding unify diverse people under a single purpose?

The task of rebuilding required all of the people and all of their gifts. What gifts is God asking you to share in this season of your life?



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## **Day Two: Criticism**

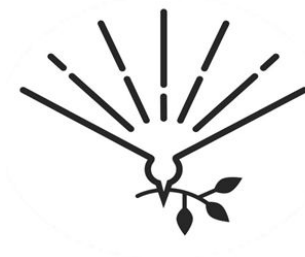
Read Nehemiah 4:1-9

Progress doesn't come without criticism. See verse 1. How are Nehemiah and the builders being criticized and what do their opposition intend to achieve in their criticism?

Nehemiah has exemplified James 2:19. He has been "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." However, here we see a departure from typical prayers. What do you make of his strong plea in verses 4-5? Does this seem harsh? Why or why not?

To stand firm in presence of criticism like Nehemiah faced (verses 1-3), it is vital that we know who we are and *whose* we are. See the following verses. What do the following verses remind us about our identity as Christ followers? Which is most relevant in your faith journey right now, and why?

John 1:12  
Colossians 2:9-10  
Genesis 1:27  
Jeremiah 1:5  
1 Peter 2:9



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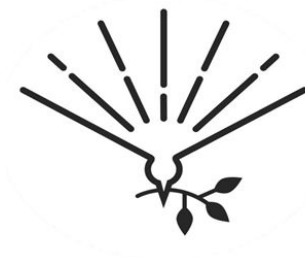
## **Day Three: Opposition**

Read Nehemiah 4: 9- 13

Verse 7 informs us that Judah is surrounded by enemies on every side. These enemies are growing increasingly angry toward them. In the midst of an imminent attack, what action do they take? See verse 9.

What can be said of the state of mind of the Israelites in the surrounding areas (see verse 10-12)? What can we learn about where they have placed their confidence? What is your initial response to fear, and what can this teach you about where you place your trust?

Nehemiah is a man of prayer, which we see again in verse 9. On the brink of war, we see him waiting for God's answer yet making practical plans. What can we learn about the relationship between trust and action? Why are they both important?



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## **Day Four: Remember the Lord**

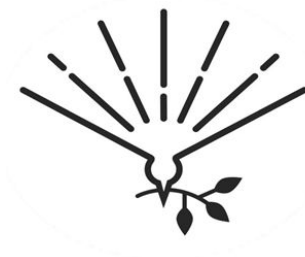
Read Nehemiah 4:14-23

Nehemiah reminds the nobles to do three things in verse 14. What are they, and how can they guide you in times of uncertainty and fear?

What does it mean to “remember the Lord”? What ways can we remember the Lord with the way we live? See Proverbs 3: 6-16.

What practical steps did Nehemiah implement to keep the builders safe? See verse 21-23.

Throughout Chapter 4, what stands out to you about how God’s people respond to opposition? How could they have been tempted to respond, yet turned to God instead?



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## **Day Five: Breaking Chains**

Read Nehemiah Chapter 5

See verses 1-5. Briefly describe the injustice the people are facing.

How does Nehemiah respond and how does he unify the people? See verse 7-13. What position is he appointed to?

How do we see the “fear of God” impact the way Nehemiah ruled the people compared to his predecessors? See verses 15-19. What does this mean for us today?

## **Day 6: Recap**

What did you learn about God this week?

What step do you need to take to grow in your trust of God this week?



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## **Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"** **Session 6 - Threats and Tenacity**

### **Introduction:**

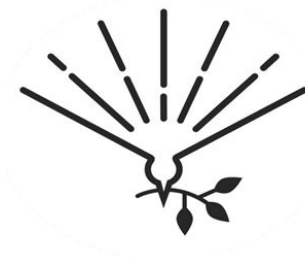
Corrie ten Boom knew something about threats. As a Dutch follower of Jesus, she and her family helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II, by hiding them in her home. The threat of being found out was constantly present as they hid people in their home, which was half a block from the police headquarters. Imagine the fear of opposition and threats! Her family was eventually turned in, and all sent to concentration camps, yet she miraculously was released by 'error'. Despite facing threats, including death her faith carried her through. She said many wise things including, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

Nehemiah wasn't afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. On the precipice of perhaps his greatest accomplishment, he didn't face opposition once, but three times. Instead of caving into the pressure, Nehemiah remains firmly grounded in the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 13:1), choosing to fear God instead of man.

### **Questions:**

Reflect on a time when you faced opposition. How did you respond?

How are you being asked to trust an unknown future to a known God?



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## Day 1: Truth and Lies

Read Nehemiah Chapter 6:1-14

What can we learn about the progress of the wall in 6:1? How did this impact the opposition's plan to thwart construction?

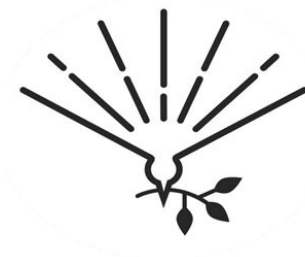
Sanballat sent an open letter (verse 5). Why would he do this?

Why did the opposition propose this meeting (see Verse 7)? Why did Nehemiah suspect an ulterior motive?

Nehemiah claimed that Shemaiah was a false prophet when he suggested that he hide in the temple (verse 12). Consider Nehemiah's response in light of Numbers 18:7 and Matthew 7:15. How did Nehemiah come to this conclusion?

Despite the opposition's best efforts, Nehemiah remained focused on the mission at hand. What are ways that you can stay focused on the truth of God when you are surrounded with lies?





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## Day 2: Fear

Nehemiah 6:14-19

How did the opposition react to the completion of the wall? See verse 16.

Nehemiah (and his people) were surrounded by adversaries who intend to disable them with fear. Make a list of people in Chapter 6 who wanted to evoke fear in their hearts. What would happen if he allowed that fear to penetrate his heart?

Nehemiah plainly states the intent of the opposition multiple times. While his opposition wants Nehemiah to fear man, Nehemiah chooses to fear God. While our modern assumption is that all fear is bad, the Bible tells us that we should fear God. Write down Proverbs 9:10. How can a healthy fear of God lead to wisdom? How is this different from a fear of man?

There are many things that humans fear instead of fearing God. With the assistance of the following verses, what strength do you have in facing your fear?

1 Peter 5:6-7 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Timothy 1:7 \_\_\_\_\_

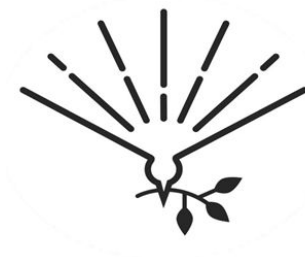
Matthew 6:24 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 10:28 \_\_\_\_\_

John 14:27 \_\_\_\_\_

John 14:27 \_\_\_\_\_

Which word, phrase, or verse stuck out to you the most that you can apply to your life?



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## Day 3: Living Securely

Read Nehemiah Chapter 7

Read verse 1-2. What is the status of the wall and Jerusalem?

Although the wall has been built, the living situation in Jerusalem was far from ideal. See verse 4. Imagine this type of city today. What issues remain?

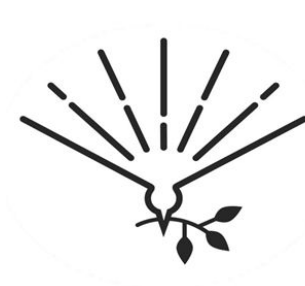
The completed wall enabled God's people to live securely. What does it mean to live securely? How does wanting physical security differ from living securely? See Job 11:18.

Chapter Seven includes a list of the returned exiles (we saw this list in Ezra 2). To jog our memories, who had returned and settled in Jerusalem?

7:8-38 \_\_\_\_\_  
7:39-42 \_\_\_\_\_  
7:43-45 \_\_\_\_\_  
7:46-65 \_\_\_\_\_

Nehemiah was trying to repopulate Jerusalem now that it was secure. Why was it important to look back to those who returned ninety years before?

Just like those who returned, God knows each of us by name. See John 10:3. What comfort does it bring you to know that God knows you by name?



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## Day 4: Delegation

Read Nehemiah 8

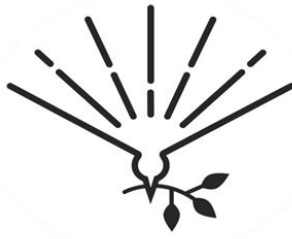
Up to this point, Nehemiah has been the “main character” of this story. However, in the beginning of Chapter 8, Nehemiah delegates spiritual leadership to another leader. Who does he delegate to and what can be said of the wisdom in recognizing your own limitations?

The people gathered to hear God’s word. What are the benefits of consistently reading the Word and what steps do you need to take to group this discipline in your life?

We see two things happening. The first is the reading of the Book, the second is the interpretation (vs 7). What can be said about the importance of each, and what is the proper relationship between the two?

Review Nehemiah 8:1-10 and notice how the word understanding/understood is used. It is more than a transfer of knowledge. Look up the definition of ‘understanding’. How is this word applied in Chapter 8?

What is God ultimately restoring? Is He still doing it today? How do you see that restoration today?



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## Day 5: Conviction Leads to Joy

Read Nehemiah 8: 9-18

Conviction is defined as a convinced conscience. What do the following verses say about conviction?

1 Thess. 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

2 Tim 3:16 \_\_\_\_\_

Heb 11:1 \_\_\_\_\_

The people wept when they heard the word of God. See Hebrews 4:12. How can the word of God lead to weeping?

After the people hear the word, Nehemiah counsels them. What does he instruct them to do and what implications do his words have for believers today? See Neh 8:10.

Their weeping turned to joy. What two reasons did the people have to rejoice?

Reread Verse 10. Nehemiah says, “the joy of the Lord is your strength”. Obedience to God leads to joy for the believer. Joy today and joy for tomorrow. What is your joy of knowing God today? What is it tomorrow?

## Day 6:

What did you learn about God this week?

What have you learned about yourself this week?



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## **Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership"** **Session 7 - Restoration**

### **Introduction:**

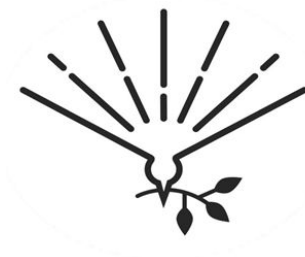
In his bestselling book, *Atomic Habits*, James Clear writes, "You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems." A good system is essential for adopting new ways of living, and living out our faith requires discipline.

The people of Jerusalem had allowed their systems to deteriorate over the years. Without the temple, the perceived presence of God, the observation of their faith slipped away. What was needed, was a restoration to a system of obedience. This week, we will see the Jewish people apply their renewed faith in God into action. Through the prayer of the Levites, they will remember the covenant between God and His people, and resolve to give God their first and their best. They will resolve to not neglect God as they had in the past. They reinstate a system to love their God with all their heart, soul and mind.

### **Questions:**

Are there ways in which your faith in God has slipped away?

What systems do you need to put in place to love God with all your heart, soul and mind?



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## **Day One: Preparing for Prayer**

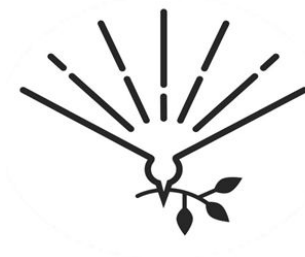
Read Chapter 9: 1-5

List the steps the Israelites took to worship the Lord on the 24th day. See verses 1-3.

We love history, yet we often want to make it about ourselves. The Israelites were no different. In light of verse 10, what is the purpose of retelling this story? Who does it ultimately point to?

Jumping ahead for a moment, verse 9:36-37 describes the people's current situation. Where are they currently? And what is the cause of their distress?

How do the Levites approach their distress (verse 5), and how can you apply their techniques when you are distressed by your own sin?



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## Day Two: Prayer

Read Nehemiah 9: 6-15

Settle in, this is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible. Take a moment and first read through verses 5-31. Now, construct a general outline of this prayer. Why is it so important to reflect upon this history?

Vs. 5-6 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 7-8 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 9-12 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 13-15 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 19-21 \_\_\_\_\_

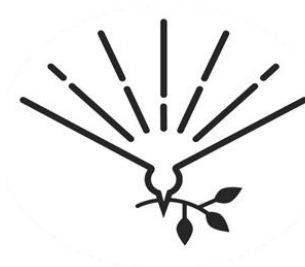
Vs. 22-25 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 26-31 \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 32-38 \_\_\_\_\_

It can be difficult seeing God as personally involved in our day-to-day lives. Even if it is hard to see, our God is a God of action. Moses told the Israelites in Deuteronomy 31:8, "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you." Read through the Levite's prayer again (9:5-24) and underline/highlight all the action phrases that show how God was with the Israelites. Write the ones that stand out to you below.

What qualities do you notice about God from this exercise?



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## Day Three: Prayer Part II

Read Nehemiah 9:16-31

The Levite's offer six examples of the Israelite's rebellion and God's response. What are they?

Rebellion (vs. 16) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (vs. 17) \_\_\_\_\_

Rebellion (vs. 18) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (vs. 19-25) \_\_\_\_\_

Rebellion (vs. 26) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (27) \_\_\_\_\_

Rebellion (vs. 28) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (vs. 28) \_\_\_\_\_

Rebellion (vs. 29) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (vs. 30) \_\_\_\_\_

Rebellion (vs. 30) \_\_\_\_\_

Response (vs. 30-31) \_\_\_\_\_

What can we learn about God's mercy from these examples? What confidence does this give you to turn toward God?





Can you relate to this seemingly endless cycle of failure and mercy? What confidence does Jesus offer in this situation? See Romans 3:25.

**Day Four: Covenant**

Read Nehemiah 10:1-33

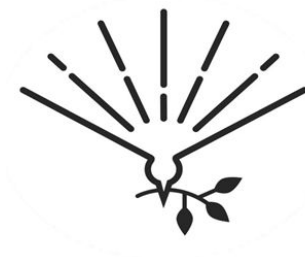
Today's reading opens up with a list of people who have committed to sign a covenant. Read through verses 1-29. What defines this group of people, and what motivates them?

Compelled to act, the people sign a covenant. What were the people agreeing to when they signed the written binding agreement? See 10:29.

Specifically, they promise to do three things, in 10:30-32. What are they?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

The covenant ensures that they will not intermarry with pagans to protect against adopting pagan customs. How do we reconcile this Old Testament concept with the New Testament example of Jesus who seeks out unbelievers? See Matthew 9:9-13.



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It still holds true that we should give God our relationships, time and resources. How can you work on honoring God in these 3 areas?

Relationships:

Time:

Resources:

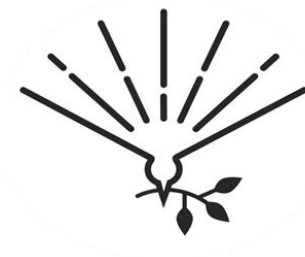
## **Day Five: First fruits**

Read Nehemiah 10: 34-39

In what ways do the Priests, Levites and people assume responsibilities? We are also called to take responsibility for our faith (Galatians 6:5-10). In what way do you need to assume responsibility in your faith?

They commit to bringing their first fruits, the first of the harvest and the very best, to God in verse 37. Is God receiving your first fruits or leftovers? Where do you need to give God the best of your resources, time and talents?

Rephrase the last statement of verse 39 in your own words. "We will" implies both a corporate and individual action. How does one act on an individual and corporate level?



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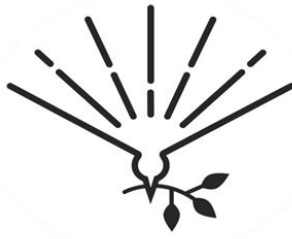
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**Day Six:**

What truths have you learned about God this week?

How can you apply them to your life?



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## Ezra & Nehemiah - "A Time to Build: A Blueprint for Visionary Leadership" Session 8: Longing for More

### **Introduction:**

Recall the story of Cinderella. She faces adversity under the rule of her evil stepmother; she goes to the ball, drops her glass slipper and lives happily ever after with the prince. However, the original version of the fairy tale takes a more sinister turn than the Disney version we all know. In the oldest versions, Cinderella kills her first stepmother so her father will marry the housekeeper instead. Envisioning Cinderella as a murderer doesn't leave us with the 'warm and fuzzy' feelings we have grown accustomed to, does it?

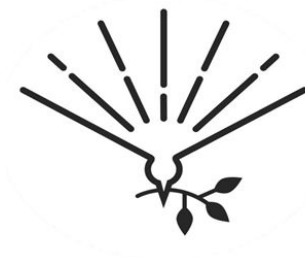
Humans crave happy endings, and are wired for stories of redemption. Perhaps this is why we have rewritten fairy tales that end on notes of hope.

This week, we will see the practical consequences of their renewed commitment to God. One might assume that they will sustain their obedience and live happily with the "joy of the Lord as their strength". However, this is not the case. After Nehemiah has organized and accomplished the rebuilding of the wall, he repopulates the city of Jerusalem, instilling godly leaders to govern. With his term as governor complete, he returns to the court of King Artaxerxes. After some time has passed, he returns to Jerusalem to discover that the people are doing the very same things for which they were exiled. While this is surely not the ending Nehemiah anticipated, it is a reminder to us that the story of God's redemption is not yet over. God will fulfill the prophecies of the long awaited Messiah; He will follow through with his promises. The happy ending, redemption, is coming.

### **Questions:**

What is your reaction to stories that lack a happy ending? What emotions do they evoke?

How does your heart yearn for the ultimate happy ending? What bible verse offers you hope of redemption?



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## **Day One: Count the Costs**

Read Nehemiah 11

Chapter 11 has two main sections. How would you summarize the list in 1-19 and 20-36?

1-19: \_\_\_\_\_

20-36: \_\_\_\_\_

Recall the description of Jerusalem in Nehemiah 7:1-4. What is said of the current state of the city? Why do you think they were reluctant to move to live in the city?

The people agree to tithe a tenth of their income to the house of the Lord in 10:38. What kind of a tithe do they commit to in 11:1-2? Why was this necessary and how do they do this?

While lots were cast to select those who would live in Jerusalem, the leaders went willingly (11:2). What does this say about their commitment to God?

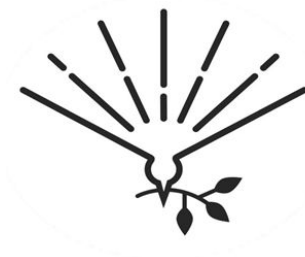
It would have been a costly move for those who were chosen to live in Jerusalem. There is always a cost to following God's Word. What do the following passages say about the cost of following Christ?

Luke 9:23 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 10:37 \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 7:13-27 \_\_\_\_\_

Romans 12:1-2 \_\_\_\_\_



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Has following Christ come at a cost for you? What has it cost you?

## **Day Two: Priests and Levites**

Read Nehemiah 12:1-26

Summarize 12:1-26, who is being listed now?

1-7 \_\_\_\_\_

8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

10-11 \_\_\_\_\_

12-21 \_\_\_\_\_

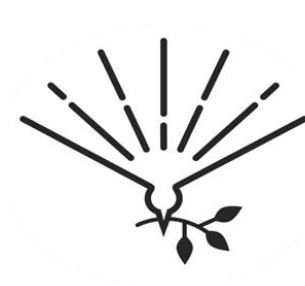
Throughout this study, we have seen lists with an importance focused on Priests and Levites. While every priest (after Moses received the Law) was a Levite, not every Levite was a priest. Let's take a moment and learn more about the importance of their roles within their faith. What else do these passages teach us? (Note: Aaron was the first high priest)

Numbers 3:6-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Exodus 30:30 \_\_\_\_\_

Malachi 2:4-7 \_\_\_\_\_

Considering these passages, do you see the role of priests and Levites in a new light? Why do you think Nehemiah and Ezra so meticulously and carefully record the priests and Levites?



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The innermost portion of the Temple is called the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter it on one day a year, the Day of Atonement, in a very particular way. (See Leviticus 16:2, Hebrews 9:7). What can we learn about God's presence in this holy space of the temple? What did this mean for the average Jew and the forgiveness of sins?

Read Hebrews 10:4-14. Jesus is our high priest. What does it mean that Jesus is our high priest? How does Hebrews 4:14-16 direct us to respond?

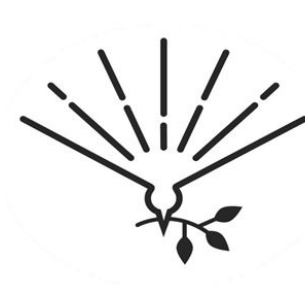
What does it personally mean to you, that Jesus is your High Priest?

### **Day Three: Celebration**

Read Nehemiah 12:27-43

Read verses 27-43. Highlight the words that exemplify the attitude of the hearts of the people of Israel. Where in our study have you seen these words before?

What do we learn in verse 27 about how the dedication of the wall was celebrated? Considering 1 Samuel 16:7, what can be said about the nature of authentic worship?



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Music was an important element in this celebration of the wall, and it still is an important element of celebration today. What is it about music that makes it such a powerful response in worship?

Do you feel great joy when worshipping? What steps of faithfulness would add to your joy in worship?

## **Day Four: Holiness**

Read Nehemiah 12: 30-47

What is it that the priests and Levites do to themselves and to the people and the gates and the wall in verse 30? Under the new covenant, Christians are not bound by strict regulations (1 John 1:7-9), but still called to holiness. Why is holiness important?

In verse 43, and in other places of the Old Testament, thanksgiving and celebration are expressed through sacrifice. Although sacrifice plays a different role in worship because of Christ, it remains a vital aspect of worship. Summarize what the believer of Christ is to sacrifice:

Romans 12:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 4:18 \_\_\_\_\_

Hebrews 13:15 \_\_\_\_\_





What do we learn about the faithfulness of the priests and Levites in their duties (vs. 45)? What affect did it have over all of the people (vs. 47)? What can be said of this connection?

It is important to stop and celebrate God's restoration: what he has done and what he promises to do. What evidence of His rebuilding have you seen in your life? How can remembering embolden you to trust him with future restoration 'projects'?

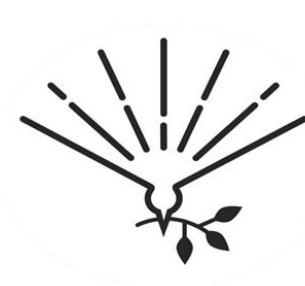
**Day Five: Longing for More**

Read Nehemiah 13

In what three ways is the covenant of Chapter 10 breached in Chapter 13?

How do their current actions compare to the Israelite's attitude toward God before exile?  
See Jeremiah 32:30-35.

Despite Israel's disobedience, God promises redemption. Read Jeremiah 31:10-14.  
What hope of redemption is offered to Israel? How is this ultimate redemption found through Jesus?



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How does Nehemiah plea to God in verses 14, 22, and 31? How does the plea in verse 29 differ?

How do you want to be remembered by God?

## **Day Five and Six: Recap**

Scan through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the notes that you have taken. What verse/concept stood out to you most?

What have you learned through this study about the character of God?

What have you learned about leadership through the example of Nehemiah and Ezra?

What concept/idea/verse in these books that wants you to know Christ in a deeper way?

What questions/doubts do you need to address?

What steps do you need to grow in your faith?