

Discussion Questions **LEADER GUIDE**

Week of 4/7/24

LifeGroup Leaders: Welcome to this new series! We're excited to spend these coming weeks in Nehemiah and to see how the Lord uses it for our church.

This week is more of an introduction so these questions are about the background more than about chapter 1. We'll be in chapter 1 next week. If you're desiring a deeper dive to help you prepare, here are a couple resources to consider:

- **The ESV Study Bible**
- **EFCA Helps Website:** <https://helps.efca.org/bundles/nehemiah-study>
- **Bible Project Resource Page:** <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-ezra-nehemiah/>

Text: Various

Icebreaker: What's the most challenging project you've been a part of (school, work, etc.)? What made it difficult and how did it turn out?

1. The first few verses of Nehemiah might make us think, "Huh?" As background, read Jeremiah 25:8-14 and 32:36-41 and consult the map and caption below from the ESV Study Bible. What do these passages reveal about God's purposes for his people?

At a minimum, we see that the exile was God's response to the unfaithfulness of his people. God determined to send them out of the land and into Babylon (remember the book of Daniel) due to their rebellion against him. Even so, we see God's good purposes to bless them in captivity and to eventually restore them to the land of Israel. God isn't merely punishing his people, but his desire is to lead them to repentance and a greater faithfulness.

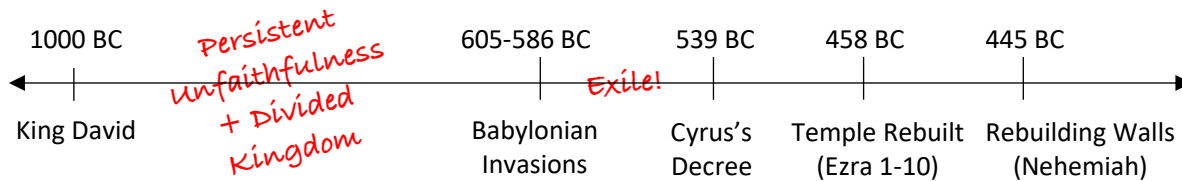


The Persian Empire at the Time of Nehemiah

c. 450 B.C.

During the time of Nehemiah, the Persian Empire had reached its greatest extent, engulfing nearly the entire Near East. In 539 B.C. the Persians under Cyrus the Great defeated the Babylonians and absorbed the lands of Israel and Judah (known as Beyond the River) into his empire. The next year he allowed the people of Judah (now called Jews) to return home and rebuild the temple of the Lord. Several waves of returning Jews continued to resettle in Judea, and Nehemiah was granted permission to rebuild Jerusalem's ruined walls around 445 B.C.

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Application: Jeremiah's words help us remember that God is ultimately in charge of history's events. What difference do you think that makes for us today?

It's easy to be upset when we read today's headlines or consider what the future might bring. If we'll let it, Nehemiah can be a reminder that God is sovereign even when life feels out of control.

2. Read Nehemiah 1:1-3. In a word or two, how would you describe the kind of situation Nehemiah and the rest of God's people are facing?

Application: What can happen to our faith when we face difficult circumstances? What do you think can we do to help strengthen our faith for difficult times?

3. Verse 2 mentions those who had survived the "exile"—the roughly 70-year period during which God's people were forced to live away from their home as subjects of other empires. What kind of challenges come with living in exile?

The book of Daniel is helpful here. Exile is, among other things, a place and time where we can feel surrounded by a culture that does not share our values or worship our God. Can you imagine what that might be like?! It's disorienting in other ways too—strange customs, an unfamiliar language, an uncomfortable feeling of being an outsider, etc.

Building Christ-centered communities of people fully devoted to loving God and loving others.

Application: Is there a sense in which we as Jesus followers can experience a sense of “exile” even if we have never lived outside our homeland?

1 Peter picks up on this idea, both in 1:1 and 1:17, and it is a continuous theme throughout Scripture. God’s people should have a sense in which we see our lives as one of “exile” as we await the culmination of what God is doing in history by bringing his kingdom. Until then, we live in this world or in this age, yet as citizens of heaven (John 17:14-16; Phil 3:20-21). Even though these events are long, long ago in land far, far away, we can hopefully relate in a general sense to what the experience of exile would be like. Living in exile isn’t ideal, but even worse is when a person is in exile but has grown so comfortable with the values and norms of the surrounding culture that he or she feels perfectly at home.

4. *Application:* What are you hoping to get out of this series?

Take time as a group to pray that the Lord would use the book of Nehemiah to help encourage our faith and deepen our faithfulness to Jesus.