

**WELCOME****ICE BREAKER.**

Has God ever given you a task/vision which seems too hard – too big? How did you cope and did you complete it?

**WORSHIP – Psalm 23****BRIEF BACKGROUND**

Jewish tradition identifies Nehemiah himself as the primary author of this historical book. Much of the book is written from his first-person perspective. He was serving in the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes ([Nehemiah 1:11–2:1](#)). This prestigious position reveals something of Nehemiah's integrity.

The book of Nehemiah could be read as a sequel to the book of Ezra, and some scholars believe the two were originally one work. It is possible that Ezra compiled Nehemiah's original accounts with other material to create the book of Nehemiah. However, most scholars believe the book was written by Nehemiah. The book opens in the Persian city of Susa in the year 444 BC. Later that year, Nehemiah travelled to Israel. Most of the book centres on events in Jerusalem. The narrative concludes around the year 430 BC, and scholars believe the book was written shortly after.

Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi was a contemporary of Nehemiah.

**Perhaps this next section should be read after the questions?**

Nehemiah was a layman, not a priest like Ezra nor a prophet like Malachi. He served the Persian king in a secular position and his expertise in the king's court helped prepare and equip him for the task and purpose that God had for him which was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and bring his people to repentance. Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal. Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in a palace for hard labour. His humility before God is seen in his moving intercessory prayers in chapters 1 and 9. He was an excellent example for the

people. He did not claim glory for himself but always gave God the credit for his successes.

Nehemiah recorded the reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem, Judah's capital city. Together, he and Ezra, who led the spiritual revival of the people, directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity.

Nehemiah's life provides a fine study on leadership. He overcame opposition from outsiders as well as internal turmoil. He exercised his administrative skills in his strategy to use half the people for building while the other half kept watch for the Samaritans who, under Sanballat, threatened attack ([Nehemiah 4–7](#)). As governor, Nehemiah negotiated peace among the Jews who were unhappy with Persian taxes. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goals. Accomplishing those goals resulted in a people encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future.

**WORD****READ NEHEMIAH 1:1-4 + 11b**

The Israelites had been in captivity in Babylon and were now beginning the return to Jerusalem

- Who was Nehemiah? (vv1, 11b)
- Why was Nehemiah in such distress and how did he react (vv5-11a)  
In this intercessory prayer we notice several important requests and acknowledgment of who God is.
- How does Nehemiah start his prayer (vv5,6). Discuss the important aspects of his prayer.
- Nehemiah doesn't just come in repentance for himself. Who else does he pray for and why? (vv7,8)
- What are the consequences and what is God's promise? (vv8,9)
- Nehemiah pleads with God (vv10,11). What do you think he is referring to in v10.

**READ CHAPTER 2:1-4**

- What was Nehemiah's occupation and why was it a prestigious role?
- What did King Artaxerxes notice about Nehemiah? (vv1,2)
- How did Nehemiah react when the King asked, "What is it you want?"  
What was his immediate response?

- Nehemiah seems to gain confidence. What requests did the King grant him?
- Who were the Israelites enemies?

Skim read vv11-20

- Note Nehemiah's careful observation of the walls before he shared his plans. Why do you think he did this?

### Perhaps you would like to read the rest of the book at home!

Chapters 3 & 4 record the methodology of rebuilding the walls under Nehemiah's leadership – his strategy and careful planning – his encouragement of the people – his provision in case of enemy attacks – his humility – his patience – his constant seeking of God in prayer and giving God the glory. He was called to a mammoth task.

- How did Nehemiah handle the opposition he faced in 4:1-15?
- What further plans did he make in 16-23?

In **Chapter 5** Nehemiah faces the inner turmoil of the poor and confronts the officials on their behalf.

In **Chapter 6** further opposition attacks attempts to derail Nehemiah from his task. He shows complete trust and reliance on God.

**Chapter 7** sees the completion of the work and gives lists of the exiles who had returned.

**Chapter 8** Ezra, the Priest, read the Law of Moses to all the people who had been called by Nehemiah – and they celebrate.

In **Chapter 9** the people confess their sins in a long prayer – VV5-38. This ends with the signing of an agreement. The names and the terms of the agreement are in **Chapter 10**, ending with the promise, "We will not neglect the house of our God."

**Chapters 11 & 12** are further lists of residents of Jerusalem and ends with the dedication of the wall in a great celebratory festival.

**Chapter 13** tells of the start of the backsliding of the Israelites into their old ways. Nehemiah was no longer in Jerusalem as he had returned to King Artaxerxes after 12 years. He had left in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of the King and returned in the 32<sup>nd</sup> year. On hearing about the evil behaviour of the priests Nehemiah asked the King if he could return to Jerusalem and was granted his request.

How can we ensure that we are not diverted from the task we are called to – prayer.

We remember from last week how God had used Esther to save her people and how Mordecai told her that she had been prepared **"for such a time as this"**. Nehemiah too, had been prepared to complete God's plan for his people, **"for such a time as this."**

**At Home.** Reflect on what this book shows us about Nehemiah's relationship with God, with the King, with the people.

How did God look after Nehemiah and show him that his hand was on him? Think about Nehemiah's character and the gifts that God had given him to complete the task. Think about his perseverance and the completion of the task God gave him to do.

### Witness.

- God has a task for each one of us. We are/have been placed here **"for such a time as this"**.
- Pray for Middlewich, Winsford, and Northwich in the Advent Season with its emphasis on consumerism.
- Pray for those in need, especially those who are ill, in pain on lonely.
- Pray for those for whom the Christmas Season will hold many sad and painful memories.
- Pray for our protection, especially our health.
- Pray that we won't be 'derailed' by being too busy to spend enough time with God as we prepare for the real reason for Christmas.

The book of Nehemiah shows us the kind of significant impact one individual can have on a nation. Nehemiah served in secular offices, using his position to bring back to the Jews order, stability, and proper focus on God.

God uses all manner of people in all manner of places doing all manner of work. Do you feel you must be "in ministry" in order to serve God? Be encouraged; He is not limited by your vocation. In fact, God has placed you where you are for a purpose. Have this attitude about your work: "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" ([Colossians 3:17](#)).