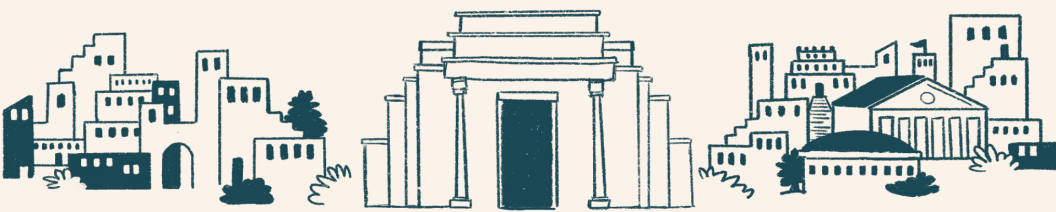


REBUILT

EZRA + NEHEMIAH

SEASON 3+4



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why this series is important

Deconstruction - a process of reexamining and questioning one's beliefs and values.

There has been a large exodus from Christianity in the West over the last 20 years. Churches, pastors, and leaders have hypothesized about why, but it hasn't changed the reality that the influence of Christ, and by extension, His church, in society has diminished.

Sometimes those leaving have done so with bitterness and anger, but more often with a quiet, aching sense that the faith they developed is no longer holding up. It seems like everywhere you turn, someone is deconstructing their faith, and that's made us in the church...anxious.

A lot of people are afraid to even talk about it, either because acknowledging it makes it more real or **because their faith** isn't holding up anymore, and they are afraid of what exploring it might lead to.

But here's something we've learned: ignoring the cracks in a person's faith doesn't make them go away. If anything, it keeps us from doing the one thing God has always invited His people to do: face what's broken and begin the work of rebuilding.

That's why the story of **Ezra and Nehemiah** is so relevant right now.

The story was written in a time when God's people were living in the aftermath of devastation. Their temple had been destroyed, their city walls torn down, and their identity stripped away.

In some ways, it mirrors the experiences of churches and Christians today. Trust in religious institutions has crumbled. Leaders have failed. Some believers have walked away, while others stand in the rubble, unsure of what to do next.

But there's hope. Ezra and Nehemiah show us what happens when God meets His people in the ruins. It's a reminder that deconstruction isn't the end of the story; it's just the beginning of a new chapter in a book with a lot of chapters.

Throughout history, whenever faith has become overly institutionalized or distorted by power, God has found ways to restore his Word to his people, forcing them to reckon with what had been built in His name and whether it still reflected His heart.

In Jesus' day, the truth was guarded by the religious authorities. In the 15th century, it was kept in Latin and controlled by the Church's hierarchy. But in both cases, God intervened so that **His voice could be heard again by everyday people**. These moments weren't just theological upgrades; they were reformations focused on rebuilding and renewal.

And now, I believe it's happening again.

People no longer seem content to let pastors and institutions do their thinking for them. With online forums, podcasts, and open-access theological resources, an increasing number of believers, skeptics and deniers are asking tough questions that require genuine answers. Conversations about God's Word have made their way out of locked rooms and into living rooms, coffee shops, group chats, discussion threads and video reels.

And yes, it's been messy.

Deconstruction is always messy. I've never seen a home renovation that didn't start with a lot of dust, a pile of broken materials, and a huge mess. But we're not supposed to walk away from the ruins; **we're supposed to start picking up the pieces.**

This series is an invitation to that.

We may face some uncomfortable truths about what is broken in us and in the church. We might need to admit that not everything we've tried has been good, even when it came from a good heart. But we're also going to see the grace of a God who rebuilds—slowly, faithfully, and completely.

You probably know someone who's deconstructing their faith—maybe that someone is you. Wherever you are in your life's journey, this series isn't about perfect answers or reestablishing an institution. It's about finding the Grace of Jesus in the rubble and rebuilding your faith, or someone else's, on a firm foundation.

So here's my challenge: don't be intimidated by the task ahead, because you were never supposed to do it alone anyways.

Let's do it the way God's people always have.

Let's rebuild, together.

series overview

september 2025 – june 2026

We know. Ten months is a long time.

In a world where most things are fast and bingeable, it might feel strange to stay in one series for almost a whole year. But this isn't just a series, it's a journey. We're slowing down on purpose so we don't miss what God is showing us.

To keep things fresh and allow us to key in on all the themes available to us in Ezra and Nehemiah, we've broken down our series into six **"Seasons."** Think of it almost like a TV Series. One overall theme with six sub-plots, each with its own focus, flavour and heartbeat. These seasons will help us trace the shape of the story and pay close attention to the different aspects of spiritual rebuilding. They also give us space to pause, reflect and re-engage along the way.



let's break it down

Season 1: Return & Restore Worship - Sep. 2025

God calls His people back from exile—not just to reclaim land but to rebuild worship. This season helps us reflect on how spiritual renewal begins with returning to God's presence and recovering what we've lost.

Season 2: Opposition & Perseverance - Oct. 2025

Every holy mission faces resistance, but God strengthens those who keep building through the pressure. In this season, we'll learn how to persevere in faith when life pushes back hard.

Season 3: Dealing with the Past - Jan. 2026

God sends leaders steeped in Scripture to lead a generation out of broken cycles. This season invites us to bring our history to the light and walk forward with truth, grace, and healing.

Season 4: Fortifying Faith - Feb. 2026

Rebuilding isn't just about what's broken—it's about what's next. In this season, Nehemiah's courage and conviction call us to develop a faith strong enough to hold under pressure.

Season 5: The Role of the Church - Apr. 2026

God's justice starts within His people, not outside them. This season challenges us to be a church marked by equity, compassion, and courageous accountability.

Season 6: Renewal for the Journey - May 2026

Revival doesn't end with a celebration—it moves into a life of sustainable faithfulness. In this final season, we explore what it means to live as a rebuilt people with enduring joy, purpose, and hope.

Who Was Ezra?

Background

Ezra was both a scribe and a priest.

As a scribe, Ezra was a scholar of the Law, an interpreter of Scripture, and a teacher of God's covenant. Being a scribe gave Ezra's wisdom and teaching significant credibility.

As a priest, Ezra's lineage was deeply rooted in the priestly tradition, connecting him to generations of spiritual leaders and cultural traditions. Ezra was a descendant of Aaron, Israel's first high priest, which was a big deal.



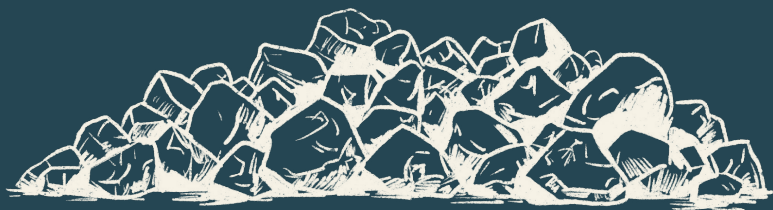
Aaron: The First High Priest

Aaron, Moses's brother, was chosen by God to serve as Israel's first high priest. He was also a descendant of Levi, one of Jacob's twelve sons.

Aaron's role was to represent the people before God, offering sacrifices, interceding for their sins, and maintaining the holiness of the Tabernacle. The high priest carried both the weight of Israel's failures and the hope of their forgiveness.

Ezra - The Leader Israel Needed

Born in Babylon during the exile, Ezra grew up never seeing Solomon's Temple or the land of his ancestors. He was raised in a foreign empire, among a people learning to live out their faith in a world where their religious and political centers had been destroyed, but he also would have carried the cultural memory of those things and felt the collective grief over what was lost. This was likely a strong motivation for Ezra to become devoted to preserving and teaching the Scriptures, as we learn in Ezra 7:10. Ezra's life mission: to study, live, and teach God's Word.



timeline

Jerusalem destroyed; exiles go to Babylon 586 BC	First exiles return to Jerusalem 538 BC	Temple completed 515BC	Xerxes 1 becomes king of Persia 486 BC	Artaxerxes I becomes king of Persia 465 BC	Ezra comes to Jerusalem 458 BC	Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem; wall completed 445 BC	Nehemiah returns to Babylon 433 BC	Nehemiah goes back to Jerusalem 432 BC	Malachi begins his ministry 430 BC
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Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem

We pick up with Ezra around 458 BC, decades after the Temple had already been rebuilt by the group of Israelites led by Zerubbabel and Joshua. The walls of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and though worship had been restored, spiritual compromise had quietly crept back into the community.

Zerubbabel's mission was to rebuild the Temple

King Artaxerxes gave Ezra permission and funding to lead a new group of exiles back to Jerusalem.

Therefore, **Ezra's** mission was to rebuild the people.

Ezra gathered priests, Levites, and families willing to return. He prayed and fasted for protection, and he carried valuable offerings to the Temple. Ezra's journey took about four months to complete, and by the end of his ministry in Jerusalem, he had a sizable impact on the future of the faith.



Ezra's Legacy

Ezra's influence extended far beyond his lifetime. He is often regarded as the spiritual architect of post-exilic Judaism. His work helped shape what would become the defining marks of Jewish faith for centuries:

- The centrality of Scripture. Ezra's emphasis on studying and teaching the Law set a pattern for the synagogue system, where Scripture and teaching complemented Temple sacrifice as the heart of worship after the Exile.
- The rise of teachers and scribes. Ezra's role as a scholar and interpreter of God's Word inspired later generations of scribes.
- A written faith. The preservation and organization of the Torah, and possibly the historical books, are often attributed in part to Ezra's influence. He ensured that Israel's story would not be lost again to exile or amnesia.
- A redefined covenant community. Ezra helped the people see that being God's people wasn't about territory or politics; it was about holiness, obedience, and worship rooted in God's truth.

Why Ezra Still Matters

Ezra shows that revival doesn't always begin with loud miracles or public victories. Sometimes it starts with open Bibles and humble hearts. His story teaches us that **you cannot rebuild what you do not recognize as broken.**

Through Ezra, we see that dealing with the past isn't about shame, it's about restoration. It's about returning to God's design so that what's rebuilt can stand the test of time.

season 3 WEEK 1

introduction

Dealing With the Past

If you've ever renovated a house, you know that sometimes a project reaches the point where fresh paint isn't enough. Beneath the surface, old wires, leaky pipes or mouldy insulation affect the health and safety of your home, and you need to start ripping things out to deal with problems that began long before you got there.

For Israel, the work of rebuilding wasn't just about replacing the stone and timber of the temple; it was about restoring trust, obedience, and purity before God. As Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he didn't start with blueprints or battle plans; he started by facing what had gone wrong.

Ezra understood that **renewal begins where repentance has taken root.**

Living in the Tension

Ezra stepped into a community that was misguided and confused. God's people were doing their best to follow Him while also dealing with past mistakes, much like a renovation project where doing the right thing is complicated by previous homeowners making poor choices.

Ezra's task was easy to identify but difficult to accomplish; he needed to hold **gratitude** and **grief** in his hand at the same time. He needed to celebrate what was right, confront what was wrong, and call the people back to wholehearted devotion.

There's Nothing New Under The Sun.

Today, that same work belongs to **us**. We live in a time when much has been built for the glory of God, and those things should be celebrated. Churches are continually being planted. Lives are being transformed. And most congregations strongly desire to bless their communities.

But we haven't always gotten it right.

There have been many times that we've tried to do God's work in our own strength and have mistaken **clever ideas** for **Spirit-led direction**.

Today, the challenge looks different, as the church seems to be losing itself in partisan politics and is being distracted by the animosity of culture wars. When this happens, the result is a church that is absorbed in theological nitpicking rather than caring for the lost and broken.

What To Expect from Season 3

In Season 3, we're reminded that God's Spirit never leaves His people, even when we might leave Him.

Dealing with the past isn't about assigning blame or clinging to nostalgia, though. It's about being honest before God about where we've been, what we've learned, and who we're becoming.

reflection questions

- **When you think about building your faith or your church, do you tend to focus more on outward expression or inward renewal?**
- **In what ways might God be asking you to hold gratitude and repentance in your heart at the same time?**
- **If you were to take an honest inventory of your faith, what are the areas where you sense God saying, "It's time to rebuild"?**

season 3 WEEK 2

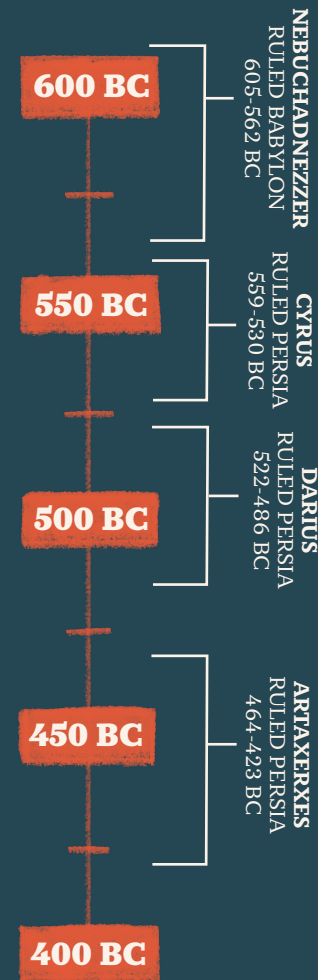
the king's hand and God's favour

Ezra 7:1-28

In a twist of divine irony, the next stage of Israel's spiritual rebuilding is made possible (in part) by **Artaxerxes I**, ruler of the Persian Empire.

Ezra 7 records how Artaxerxes gives Ezra everything he needs to lead a new wave of exiles back to Jerusalem. Artaxerxes funds the journey, provides supplies for temple worship, and authorizes Ezra to teach and enforce God's Law. It's an astonishing decree, especially from a king of a pagan empire. This reveals a truth that still shapes how we see the world today: God can move the hearts of anyone to fulfill His purposes. Even if their motivations are not God's motivations, God works through them for His good.

a royal who's who



Unfortunately, none of these kings trusted God. However, God used each of these kings to accomplish His good purposes.

Sourced from CSB Explorer Bible

Artaxerxes I

Artaxerxes - throne name meaning "righteous ruler" or "whose reign is through truth." His personal name may have been Ardeshir in Old Persian.

Lineage - son of Xerxes I (husband of Queen Esther) and Queen Amestris.

Rise to Power - became king after killing his father's assassin, and possibly his own brother, to secure the throne around 465 BC. His early years as king were marked by political instability and rebellion within the empire.

Reign and Policies - known for consolidating control across his vast empire and favouring diplomacy over aggression. Allowed various religious groups a degree of autonomy, provided they remained loyal and maintained peace.

Legacy - Ruled for over forty years and is remembered as a stabilizing force after years of upheaval. His policies helped preserve Persian dominance and supported the spiritual restoration of God's people in Israel.

King Artaxerxes Through Ezra and Nehemiah

Artaxerxes appears multiple times across the biblical narrative:

- In Ezra 4, he's the king who temporarily halted rebuilding efforts in Jerusalem after being warned of possible rebellion, showing his caution as a ruler. (Remember, though, this section is "out of order". For clarity, go back and watch S2:W2 of this series.
- In Ezra 7, he is supporting Ezra's journey and temple reforms.
- In Nehemiah 2, years later, he grants Nehemiah permission to rebuild Jerusalem's walls, furthering the restoration process begun under Ezra.

The thread of King Artaxerxes through our story reminds us that human leadership may shift between fear and favour, but God's sovereignty remains constant. Artaxerxes' decisions, both in his resistance and in his generosity, perfectly aligned with God's redemptive timeline for His people.

I wonder if, when Ezra looked at Artaxerxes, he saw a sign that God's hand was still at work, that history wasn't random, and that God was breathing new life into his people. In every generation, God writes His story through the faith of His people. He also works through those who don't even know they're part of his story. The challenge for us is to trust that His sovereignty still stands



So I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned. Come, let's rebuild Jerusalem's walls, so that we will no longer be a disgrace."

– Nehemiah 2:17

reflection questions

- **How might this encourage you when you look at today's world, where leadership often feels unpredictable and co-opting of faith?**
- **Ezra's success was described as the result of "the gracious hand of God." How can we discern when God's hand is guiding our own efforts?**
- **What can the modern church learn from Ezra's humility in working under a foreign king's authority while remaining faithful to God's Law?**
- **How does this story challenge our tendency to separate the "spiritual" and "secular" parts of our lives?**

season 3

WEEK 3

stop and smell the tamarisks

Ezra 8:1–36

Sometimes we just want to get to the end of a story, but Ezra 8 invites us to slow down. Instead of simply saying “they travelled” and “they arrived,” Scripture takes time to name names, count families, describe campsites, and record prayers. It’s as if God is saying, “Don’t skip over the road that got you here.”

When you look at Ezra’s journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, it was almost like a reformation. The group carried more than gold and silver; they carried the hopes of a nation and the sacred responsibility of rebuilding

worship in Jerusalem. This wasn’t a sprint toward progress; it was a walk of faith. Every pause, every prayer, every decision along the way says something about how God forms His people as they move toward His promise.



From the family of Ithamar: Da
From the family of David: Hatt
descendant of Shecaniah.

From the family of Parosh: Zec
other men were registered.

From the family of Pahath-moa
son of Zerariah and 200 other

**"The hand of our God is
gracious to all who seek him,
but fierce anger is against all
who abandon him."**

– Ezra 8:22

From the family of Tattai: Sh
Jahaziel and 300 other men.

From the family of Adin: Ebed
and 50 other men.

From the family of Elam: Jesh
Athaliah and 70 other men.

From the family of Shephatiah:

Journey Home

Ezra's journey began in **Babylon**. From there, the people followed the **Euphrates River**, winding northwest before turning south toward the land of promise. The terrain shifted from green river valleys to barren desert stretches. Much like their spiritual journey, their path back home wasn't straightforward.

Ezra's group stopped at the **Ahava Canal**, a quiet place of gathering and reflection, before continuing forward through the hardest part of the journey.

Here, Ezra took time to assess who was coming and count the families. By slowing down, Ezra noticed that something was missing — the **Levites**! He refused to move forward without them, so the people waited, sent word, and didn't take another step until the right people were in place. When they were finally ready to move again, Ezra called the people to **fast and pray**, seeking God's protection for the long, dangerous road ahead.

Ezra's careful organization, his willingness to pause, and his faith to move forward tell us something profound: sometimes obedience looks like efficiency, but other times it looks like waiting, praying, and trusting that God will show up along the way.



What should you stop and smell?

We often treat the journey as something to get through. The stretch of time between the prayer and the answer, or the dream and the destination. But in God's story, **the journey** is always part of the Rebuild.

Ezra's story reminds us that progress isn't always measured in milestones, but in how deeply we learn to depend on God between them. Every stop, every delay, every unexpected turn was part of how God prepared His people to rebuild faithfully once they arrived.

In the same way, the paths we walk and our seasons of waiting, reflection, or reorganization are often the places where God does His most transformative work.

The journey isn't wasted time; **it's holy ground**. When we slow down to notice God's hand along the way, we begin to see that rebuilding isn't just about where He's taking us, but who He's making us into on the way.

reflection questions

- Where in your life do you sense God inviting you to slow down and pay attention to the process rather than focusing on the outcome?
- How might remembering where you've been help you to see God's hand more clearly in where you're going?
- What would change in your life if you began to see the journey itself as holy ground — part of how God is rebuilding your faith?

season 3 WEEK 4

all fall short

Ezra 9 & 10

In any context, understanding what falling short looks like requires a clear view of our expectations, and it's here where so many people (both inside and outside the church) get it wrong.

There seems to be an understanding that the **goal** of a Christian should be to follow all of God's rules - but that's not it.

It's not about following the rules; it's about loving our neighbours. It's about reaching out with grace and mercy. It's about looking at the life Christ lived and using that to model our hearts, words, and actions.

When that doesn't happen, it results in **hurting or failing others**. And there are **three words** used in the Bible for how we fail each other.



Sin, Transgression & Iniquity

Sin: To be in a relationship means that we have a duty to each other. For example, having a spouse or a child comes with a duty to protect, nourish and bless. Our "aim" in life should be to do our duty generously and joyfully. We hit the mark when we protect, nourish and bless well. Sin is **missing the mark**. It's failing at something we ought to do well. Maybe we do it poorly. Maybe we don't do it at all. Either way, it misses the mark, and it hurts the ones we are supposed to love.

Transgression is a harder word, but it just means to betray trust. Those in a relationship with us trust that, because of that relationship, we will do our best to hit the mark. When, instead, we do things that actually hurt them, we have transgressed against them. We betrayed their trust.

Iniquity paints a picture of all hurtful acts as "bent" or "twisted". It's the opposite of whole, healthy and upright. Sin = transgression = iniquity, and together they capture the pain we inflict on God, each other, ourselves and even our world. Together, they paint a picture of how we have fallen far short of the glory of God.

Sin in the Biblical Narrative

From Eden on, sin has distorted everything good that God created. It separates humanity from our Creator and from one another, producing guilt (the legal consequence), shame (the relational and emotional consequence), and death (the ultimate consequence). Under the old covenant, sin was dealt with sacrifice and substitution, the reminder that forgiveness required the shedding of innocent blood. In the new covenant, the sacrificial requirement of the law is satisfied once and for all through Jesus, whose innocent blood covered the sin of the world through His death and resurrection."

how Christians have faced sin through history

The theology of sin has always shaped the practice of repentance, and how believers confess, seek forgiveness, and live in restoration.



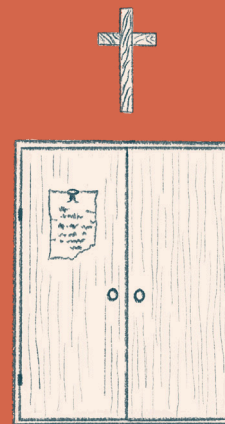
Early Church (1st–4th centuries)

Confession was often public. Christians openly admitted sin before the gathered community as a step toward restoration. Accountability was corporate, and the church helped carry one another's burdens.



Medieval Church (5th–15th centuries)

Confession gradually became a sacrament of penance, usually private before a priest, paired with acts of contrition or restitution. The emphasis was on both inner sorrow and outward atonement.



Reformation (16th century)

Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin reasserted that forgiveness flows directly from Christ's finished work, not from priestly mediation. Repentance was still vital, but it was understood as a daily reorientation of heart and mind toward God's grace.



Modern Christianity

Confession takes many forms in settings such as private prayer, pastoral guidance, accountability groups, and communal confession in worship. Yet across traditions, the thread remains the same. God calls His people to own their sin, confess it, and walk restored in His mercy.

How Theologians Have Described Sin

Throughout Christian history, believers have wrestled with just how deep and pervasive sin's effects really are, and how grace meets them. Here are two examples.

Calvinist Theology teaches total depravity: sin has corrupted every part of human nature, including the mind, will, and heart. Humanity cannot, on its own, turn toward God or even desire Him. Repentance and faith themselves are gifts of God's grace, the evidence that God has already begun His saving work. Key idea: We don't repent to earn grace; we repent because grace has already found us.

Arminian Theology agrees that sin touches every part of us, but emphasizes prevenient grace that awakens the heart so that every person can respond to God's invitation. In this view, repentance involves genuine human cooperation with divine initiative.

Key idea: God's grace opens the door, but we must choose to walk through it.

Repentance Shouldn't Wait

All these traditions and distinctions affirm what Ezra already knew, that sin is universal, repentance is necessary, and forgiveness is entirely an act of God's mercy.

Many people have strong feelings about their theology of sin, and there's no doubt that theological debate and understanding around this topic are not only important

but necessary. Where we often fall short is spending more time debating how sin works than identifying and confessing it in our own lives.

Simply put, it's a lot easier to debate sin than to take responsibility for it.

Whatever we think of sin, when the Holy Spirit, God's Word, or a godly friend says you've "missed the mark," humility and grace have always proven to be the best first step.

reflection questions

Note: Knowing that it's unlikely everyone reading this book is a follower of Jesus, consider how to answer these questions in the context in which you were brought up. Perhaps consider how you learned the difference between "right" and "wrong," and if the word "sin" was ever used, even in a cultural context.

- How did you think of sin growing up? How is it different now?
- Did you ever experience an object lesson, sermon illustration, Sunday school story, or a family rule about sin that shaped your understanding of it? Does that lesson still hold up today?
- Who taught you what forgiveness looks like? Was it modelled more through rules and fear, or through grace and restoration?
- Think back to a time when you first realized that sin wasn't just about breaking rules but about harming your relationship with God or others. (Maybe that moment is right now!) Did/does that realization change anything for you?

Who Was Nehemiah?

Background

Nehemiah (whose name means “The Lord Comforts”) was a Jewish exile serving in the Persian royal court during the reign of King Artaxerxes I. His position as cupbearer to the king was far more significant than it sounds. It meant he had intimate access to the king, tasting his wine to ensure its safety, managing some royal affairs, and being a trusted advisor in one of the most powerful courts in the world.

Although Nehemiah took his role in the court seriously, his heart remained tied to Jerusalem, the city of his ancestors and the centre of God’s promises. When he heard that Jerusalem’s walls were still in ruins decades after the Temple had been rebuilt, his heart broke. That burden became his calling.

Nehemiah was not a priest or prophet. He was a normal guy working faithfully within a pagan empire when he found himself unexpectedly called into God’s rebuilding story. What an incredible bit of hope for all of us!



Personality and Outlook

Nehemiah was **compassionate, empathetic, and emotionally available** before God (“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept.” Nehemiah 1:4), and though Nehemiah’s heart was soft, his emotions never paralyzed him. His grief became intercession, and his intercession became action.

He was also a **strategic realist**. He was always aware of danger, yet never driven by fear. He was truly a rare blend: part visionary leader, part project manager, part pastor. He understood both the human heart and the logistics of building under pressure.

little power, BIG influence.

Prayer and Dependence

The book of Nehemiah contains **more recorded prayers** than any other Old Testament historical narrative. It’s full of short bursts of honest, spontaneous conversation with God. Some are deeply formal (Nehemiah 1), others are mid-crisis whispers (Nehemiah 2:4).

This reveals something about his spiritual posture: Nehemiah didn’t pray instead of acting; he prayed through every action. His instinct in stress was not to scheme first but to seek first. His leadership flowed from dependence, not self-confidence.

His Emotional Honesty

Nehemiah was remarkably **transparent** for a political official. His writing includes frustration, fear, and weariness. He records moments of confrontation, self-doubt, and even anger. Unlike some leaders who edit out weakness, Nehemiah left the rough edges visible. This vulnerability makes him relatable to modern readers who know that faithfulness doesn't always feel heroic. His emotional life shows that spiritual maturity includes both tears and tenacity, as well as the courage to feel deeply without giving up.

His Relationships and Leadership Style

Nehemiah **drew people together** not through charisma but through credibility. His trustworthiness had been tested in the Persian court, and that same integrity made people willing to follow him in Jerusalem. He wasn't driven by popularity; he was guided by principle. His leadership combined compassion with accountability.

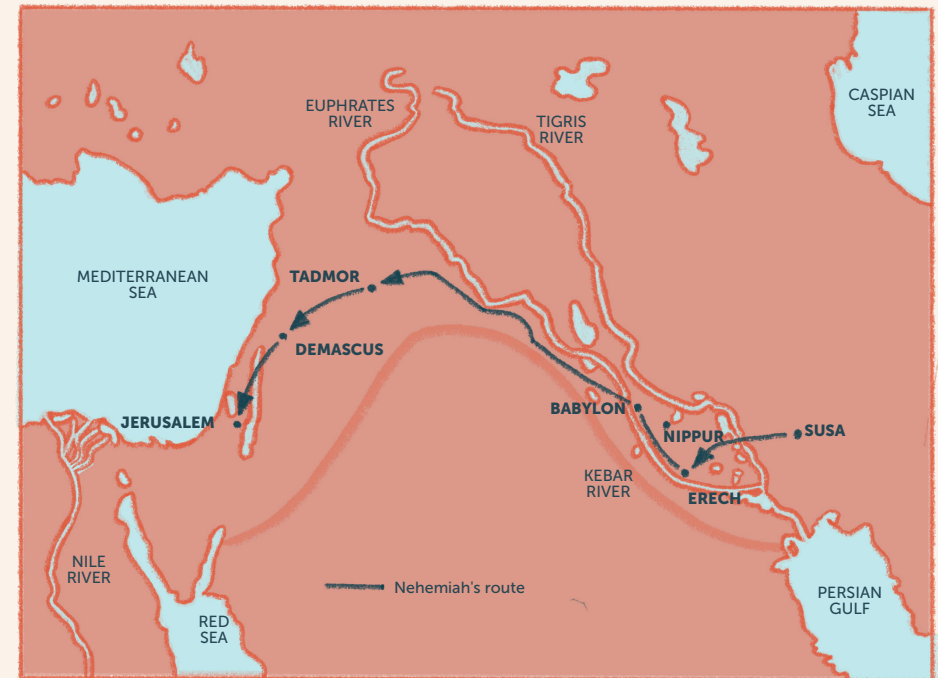
Nehemiah was also a **collaborator** who understood the importance of teams. Chapter 3's detailed record of repairing the wall highlights this trait. Priests, merchants, goldsmiths, families, nobles, everyone had a place.

Nehemiah's Legacy

When we look past the rebuilding of the walls, it's easy to believe that Nehemiah's most significant construction project wasn't the wall; it was his character. His life shows that godly leadership starts long before public influence; it begins in private faithfulness.

Nehemiah teaches us that strength and sensitivity are not opposites. He shows that leadership can be both strategic and spiritual, and that faith expressed through integrity can outlast empires.

the medo-persian empire



Nehemiah worked in Susa as a cup-bearer for the king of the vast Medo-Persian Empire. When he heard that the rebuilding projects in Jerusalem were progressing slowly, he asked the king if he could go there to help his people complete the task of rebuilding their city's walls. The king agreed to let him go, so he left as soon as possible, traveling along much the same route as Ezra had taken.

-Sourced from the NLT Life Application Bible



season 4 WEEK 1

introduction

For years, God's people had focused on restoring their *worship*.

- Under **Zerubbabel**, the altar was rebuilt.
- Under **Ezra**, the temple was re-consecrated, the Law rediscovered, and hearts turned back toward God.
- But now, as **Nehemiah** enters the story, the scene widens. What began in the temple must now **reach the city**.

A Work in Prog-mess

Historically, we jump forward about a dozen years from the final chapter of Ezra (who is still in there when Nehemiah arrives). The temple stands in Jerusalem, but the city itself still lies in partial ruin. The gates remained burned down, the walls remain broken, and as a result, the people are still vulnerable.

Enter Nehemiah — a man born in exile, serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I in the Persian court. He's not a prophet or priest but a planner, administrator, and visionary.

When news reaches him that the walls are still in ruins, it strikes him like a personal wound. His response is not political or impulsive; it's spiritual. He prays, he fasts, he weeps, and he waits.

themes for this season

While Ezra reestablished the people's relationship with God, Nehemiah helped them learn to live out that faith publicly with endurance, courage, and unity. Other themes you notice include:

Responding in prayer before taking any action

Approaching leadership opportunities with wisdom and careful timing

Inspection and Organization of the problems at hand

Facing opposition and ridicule

Resilient leadership

season 4 WEEK 2

all about walls

Why did Walls Matter?

When Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem's walls were still in ruins, his response was emotional. To him, the city's broken walls weren't just a structural problem; they were a symbol of shame, vulnerability, and disconnection from God's protection. This made sense in his time, but for us, this might feel foreign. We live in a world of drawn borders, satellites, and treaties. We understand that invisible lines on maps define nations and mark security.

But in Nehemiah's world, a city without walls wasn't a city at all. Walls didn't just protect people; they defined them. They were the physical expression of identity, stability, and belonging.

To understand Nehemiah's grief, we have to understand what walls meant — not just as architecture, but as the heartbeat of civilization.

How the Ancient World Drew Its Borders

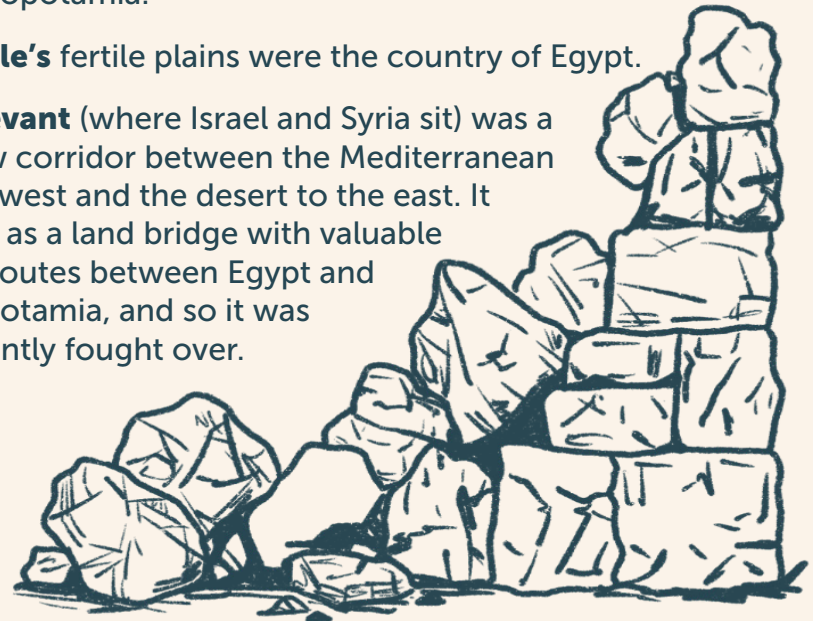
In the ancient Near East, borders weren't drawn on paper; they were **expressed through** geography. Kingdoms and tribes didn't mark their territory with fences; they used **natural features** like rivers, mountain ranges, deserts, and coastlines. Early Babylonian and Egyptian maps didn't show precise regional boundaries; they showed the world as a series of symbolic zones: land, sea, heavens, and underworld.

For example:

The **Tigris and Euphrates Rivers** defined the boundaries of Mesopotamia.

The **Nile's** fertile plains were the country of Egypt.

The **Levant** (where Israel and Syria sit) was a narrow corridor between the Mediterranean to the west and the desert to the east. It served as a land bridge with valuable trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia, and so it was constantly fought over.



Why City Walls Were Everything

For most of human history (before gunpowder), walls were the ultimate **defence system**. They defined a city's shape and size. They were engineering marvels and symbols of protection.

In a world of constant warfare, raiders and rival city-states, the difference between survival and destruction was often a strong wall. A single breach could mean your people, your livelihood, and your future were destroyed overnight. To live "inside the walls" meant safety, citizenship and belonging. To be "outside" meant vulnerability, foreignness or exile.

How Nations Protected Themselves

Ancient security was as much about strategy as it was about stone, and cities developed multi-layered defences to protect themselves from bandits, invading armies, and even wild animals.

Walls that were doubled or tripled were common. **Gates** were reinforced with iron and often flanked by towers, where soldiers stood watch day and night.

Citadels and towers sat as elevated strongholds, serving as final defence points in case the outer wall was breached.

Networks of **watchfires** enabled messages to be sent from tower to tower across valleys, using smoke or flame to warn of danger.

Finally, **natural defences** often influenced the location of cities on hills, cliffs or near rivers. For example, Jerusalem, being on the high ridges of Judah, made it easier to defend its walls.

Barriers and Belonging

In the ancient world, walls were both barriers that provided protection and symbols of belonging. They defined who you were, protected what you loved, and in Jerusalem's case, declared where God's people stood. Nehemiah's grief over the broken walls of Jerusalem was not solely about stone. He understood that their brokenness also reflected the brokenness of God's people who had not yet regained their sense of identity and security.



reflection questions

- How would you describe the "walls" that protect your own spiritual or emotional life today?
- What does it mean for a community or a church to have "broken walls"?
- In our story, we read that people built the walls together, each family taking a section. What does this suggest about the importance of Christian community today?
- Who are the people that are helping or have helped you build and guard your "section of the wall"?

season 4 WEEK 3

if it pleases the king

Nehemiah 2:1–10

When Nehemiah finally spoke to King Artaxerxes, his opening words were simple: “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in his sight...” (Nehemiah 2:5).

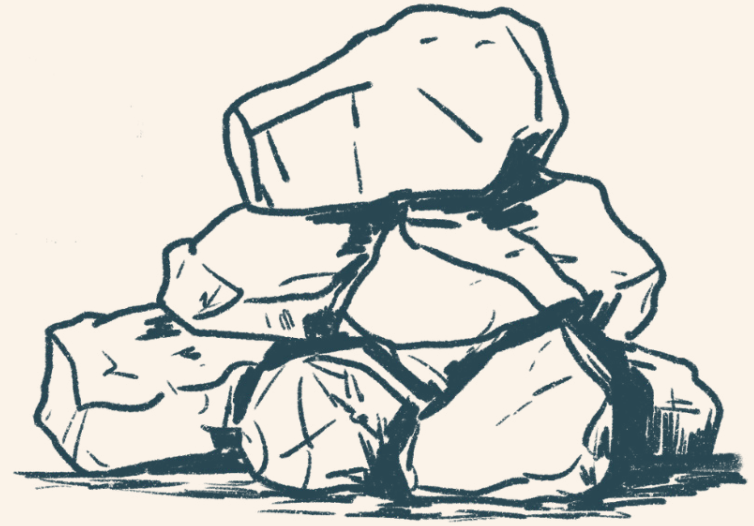
To modern ears, that sounds like ordinary courtesy. But in the Persian court, those words carried enormous weight, because saying the wrong thing to the king could cost you your life.



Life in the Persian Court

By Nehemiah’s time (mid-5th century BC), the **Persian Empire** stretched from Greece to India — the largest and most bureaucratic empire the world had ever seen. The king wasn’t just a political leader but a **living symbol of divine order**. Persian kings were often portrayed as chosen by Ahura Mazda (the Zoroastrian god). Their word was law, literally. Once a decree was made, even the king himself could not undo it (see Esther 1:19).

The palace was structured around layers of rank and ceremony designed to preserve this image of absolute authority. Every action from approaching the throne to making a request followed strict protocol. To appear before the king uninvited or in a displeasing manner was unthinkable. This explains Nehemiah’s fear when Artaxerxes asked him, “Why does your face look so sad?” Servants were expected to be calm, cheerful, and deferential, and a sad face could be interpreted as a sign of disloyalty or a rebellious spirit.



How did the Persian Court Work?

The Persian court was a blend of **power, luxury, and danger**. Historical sources such as Herodotus and Xenophon paint a picture of highly ritualized daily life. Only an **inner circle**, comprising a small group of attendants, administrators, and family members, had direct access to the king.

Every audience with the king was governed by complex rules of approach, greeting, and speech. Rivalries among courtiers were common. Everyone served at the king's pleasure, meaning favour could shift instantly.

In short, palace life was precarious. The appearance of stability was maintained by constant maneuvering behind the scenes. Loyalty mattered, but so did presentation.

So when Nehemiah risked bringing up a matter as sensitive as rebuilding the walls of a conquered city, one that could be perceived as rebellious, he was walking a diplomatic tightrope. His survival depended on both the king's mood and the grace of God. For context, Artaxerxes' father, Xerxes I, had been assassinated **by his own guards**. To say the Persian court was paranoid about conspiracies would be a huge understatement.

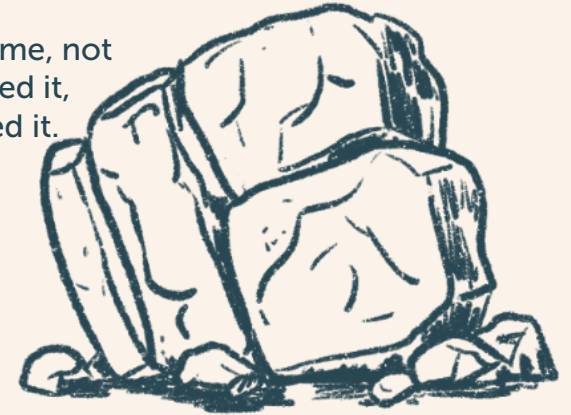


A Bridge to Today's "Courts"

We may not serve in royal courts today, but many of us live in systems that still run on protocol, timing, and trust. Nehemiah 2 reminds us that **faithfulness in the ordinary** earns credibility for the extraordinary. His daily dependability as a servant gave him a hearing as a reformer.

The right moment came, not when Nehemiah forced it, but when God allowed it.

He didn't manipulate an opportunity; **he recognized one.**



reflection questions

- Have you ever had to raise a hard issue with someone in authority? How did timing and tone affect the outcome?
- What environments in your life require the same kind of discernment Nehemiah used here?
- How do humility and confidence work together when approaching people in positions of influence?
- In what ways might "If it pleases the king" still describe how we should speak with respect and care, even in a culture that prizes bluntness?

season 4 WEEK 4

the power of quiet preparation

When Nehemiah reached Jerusalem, no one knew why he was there. After his arrival, he waited three days, quietly watching, listening and praying. Then, under the cover of darkness, he went out to inspect the city's ruined walls.

This course of action was extremely deliberate. Nehemiah had risked his life by appealing to the Persian king to get to Jerusalem. After getting permission and funding, he still didn't rush with public announcements or strategy meetings. He started by walking the ruins himself.

That quiet moment shows us a side of faith that often gets overlooked: wisdom before enthusiasm.

Before Nehemiah ever called the people to rebuild, he made sure he understood what needed rebuilding, why it mattered, and how it could be done.



how Nehemiah used prayer

REFERENCE	OCCASION	SUMMARY OF HIS PRAYER	WHAT PRAYER ACCOMPLISHED	OUR PRAYERS
1:4–11	After receiving the bad news about the state of Jerusalem's walls	Recognized God's holiness. Asked for a hearing. Confessed sin. Asked specifically for help in approaching the king.	Included God in Nehemiah's plans and concerns; prepared Nehemiah's heart and gave God room to work	How often do you pour out your heart to God? How often do you give him specific requests to answer?
2:4	During his conversation with the king	"Here's where you can help, God!"	Put the expected results in God's hands	Giving God credit for what happens before it happens keeps us from taking more credit than we should.
4:4–5	After being taunted and ridiculed by Sanballat and Tobiah	"They're mocking you, God. You decide what to do with them."	Expressed anger to God and helped keep Nehemiah from taking matters into his own hands	We are prone to do exactly the opposite—take matters into our hands and not tell God how we feel.
4:9	After threats of attack by enemies	"We are in your hands, God. We'll keep our weapons handy in case you want us to use them."	Showed trust in God even while taking necessary precautions	Trusting God does not mean we do nothing. Action does not mean we do not trust him.
6:14	Responding to threats	Looked to God for help and left his enemies in God's hands.	Showed Nehemiah's reliance on God for emotional and mental stability	How often do you ask God for help when under pressure?
13:29	Reflecting on the actions of his enemies	Asked God to deal with the enemies and their evil plans.	Took away the compulsion to get revenge and entrusted justice to God	When did you last settle a desire for revenge by turning the matter over to God?
5:19; 13:14, 22, 31	Reflecting on his efforts to serve God	"Remember me, God."	Kept clear in Nehemiah's mind his own motives for action	How many of your actions today will be done with the purpose of pleasing God?

-Sourced from the NLT Life Application Bible

show me a scarier phrase than “i’ve got a great idea!”

Here’s a dose of reality for you: *It’s easy to have a great idea.*

So often, we see a need, get inspired or emotional, and immediately tell others, try to gather momentum and start something right away. (*Pastor Mike’s side note: If I had a dollar for every time someone came to me with a great idea that the church should do right now, I’d have a lot of dollars.*)

And a lot of ideas are great, but when we move too quickly, when we call people to join a vision we don’t yet understand, we risk doing more harm than good. We can harm ourselves, because enthusiasm without clarity leads to frustration and burnout. We can hurt others by leading them into confusion rather than purpose. And we can harm the mission, because premature passion can build momentum around the wrong goal.

Nehemiah slows down long enough to let passion become perspective. He models a faith that isn’t frantic. His conviction wasn’t lessened by patience; it was strengthened by it.

Before Nehemiah asked anyone else to see the problem, he made sure he saw it clearly himself.

Many of us know what it’s like to have a great idea that wasn’t ready. We meant well. We had energy. We wanted to help. But because we didn’t take the time to truly understand the need or wait for God’s timing, our

efforts left people confused, frustrated or exhausted. Full disclosure, churches are notorious for this.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is take a step back, go for a quiet walk, and look at the walls ourselves.

What is really broken here?

What is actually needed?

Where do we need to listen before we lead?

reflection questions

Take a moment to think about a time when you had a “great idea.” Something you were sure God wanted you to do, but later realized you hadn’t fully understood the situation.

- What did that experience teach you about timing and preparation?
- How did it affect your own confidence when things didn’t go as planned?
- How did it affect the people who trusted your leadership or vision?
- How might slowing down have changed the outcome?

Maybe you’re standing in front of a broken-down “wall” right now.

Before you gather others and take a night ride like Nehemiah, take time to pray, observe and ask questions. Get to know the ruins before you start rebuilding them. Try not to confuse procrastination and preparation.

season 4 WEEK 5

getting geeky about gates

Nehemiah 3:1–32

Nehemiah 3 describes the wall's rebuilding in a full circuit around the city, beginning at the Sheep Gate in the northeast and ending at the same point thirty-two verses later. Each section was assigned to a group of citizens.

Based on what we know today, let's follow the route gate by gate (North to West), as the builders worked their way around the city.

The Sheep Gate and the Northern Towers

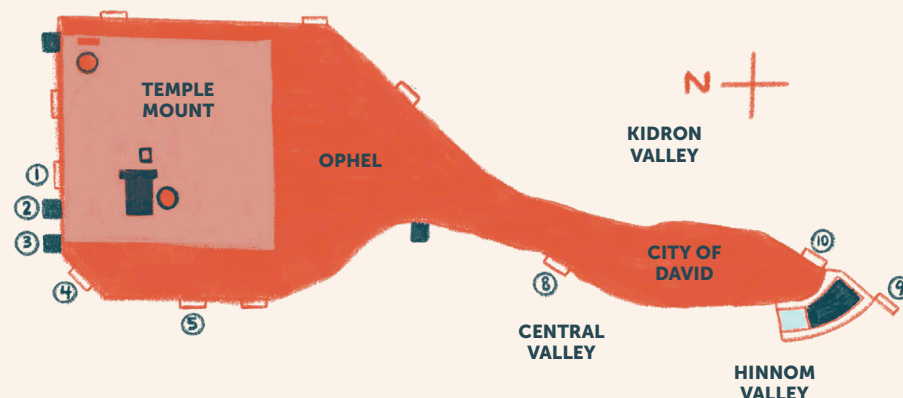
The rebuilding begins with the **Sheep Gate(1)**, repaired and consecrated by the high priest Eliashib and his fellow priests. This gate stood near the Temple complex on the northeast side of Jerusalem, close to the Pool of Bethesda. Its name likely came from its use: flocks intended for temple sacrifice were brought through this gate. The priests' involvement underscores its religious importance because they not only built it but also dedicated it.

Immediately beside it stood the **Tower of the Hundred(2)** and the **Tower of Hananel(3)**. These towers guarded the most exposed section of the northern wall, where attacks historically focused. The Tower of Hananel, whose name means "God is gracious," was so strategic that later fortifications were built on or near its foundation.

The Fish Gate and the Northern Market Quarter

Moving west, the builders came to the **Fish Gate(4)**, repaired by the sons of Hassenaah. This gate opened toward the main trade routes leading to the Mediterranean, making it a natural entry point for goods, particularly dried fish from Tyre and the coastal towns. The area around the Fish Gate likely served as a bustling commercial quarter, filled with traders and merchants.

Farther along was the **Old Gate(5)**, or the **Jeshanah Gate(5)**, which Joiada and Meshullam restored. Its name, meaning "ancient" or "old part," suggests it belonged to an earlier phase of Jerusalem's walls, possibly dating to the time of the Jebusites or King David. Its precise location is debated, but it probably stood on the city's northwestern side, where the older and newer sections of the city met.



SOURCES: NIV STUDY BIBLE

The Valley Gate and the Western Wall

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the **Valley Gate(8)**. The text notes that they rebuilt 1,000 cubits of wall (about 1,500 feet) extending toward the next gate, an enormous undertaking for a single team. This gate likely opened toward the Hinnom or Tyropoeon Valleys, providing access to the western approaches to the city. From here, the wall curved southward.

The Dung Gate and the Southern Slope

Next came the **Dung Gate(9)**, rebuilt by Malkijah, son of Rechab. The name might invoke an immature giggle (one that we don't blame you for), but it did serve an essential function. This gate opened toward the Valley of Hinnom, the city's **disposal area**, where refuse, ashes, and broken pottery were taken. Its proximity to the valley gave Jerusalem a means of sanitation. Unpleasant, but vital.

did you know?

In Hebrew the Valley of Hinnom is "Ge Hinnom", which made its way into Greek as **gehenna**, the word often used for hell in the New Testament.



The Fountain Gate and the Water System

Beyond the Dung Gate was the **Fountain Gate(10)**, repaired by Shallun, son of Col-Hozeh. This gate was near the **Pool of Siloam** and the **King's Garden**, at the southeastern end of the city, where the **Gihon Spring** emerged. This was Jerusalem's primary water source. The text mentions "the steps down from the City of David," confirming the steep slope between the upper city and the spring. The wall here protected **Hezekiah's Tunnel system**, which carried water safely inside the city during sieges. Defending this section was critical for survival.

The Tombs of David, the House of the Warriors, and the Artificial Pool

From there, the record moves north along the city's eastern ridge. The text reveals that the wall's builders were reinforcing an area rich with heritage and infrastructure.

The **Tombs of David** likely refer to the royal burial area within the ancient City of David. The **House of the Warriors** may have been a guardhouse or armoury, and the **Artificial Pool** was probably a large man-made cistern used to collect runoff, ensuring a steady water supply.

This section emphasizes that the project wasn't just about defence; it was about rebuilding the whole functioning ecosystem of the city, including water, security, and memory.

Archaeological Work in Jerusalem

Archaeological work on the eastern and southern hills of Jerusalem has confirmed sections of fortifications dating to the Persian period, though the precise identification of every gate remains debated. What's certain is that Nehemiah's wall was not a single uniform structure but a patchwork of old and new, repaired foundations from multiple eras reconnected into a functioning whole.

season 4 WEEK 6

Nehemiah 4:1–23

Trouble: Difficulty or problems.

Rubble: Waste or rough fragments of stone, brick, concrete, etc., especially as the debris from the demolition of buildings.

Rabble: A disorderly crowd; a mob.

The Trouble

Every rebuilding effort eventually hits a wall that's not made of stone, but of exhaustion.

At first, the people of Jerusalem had energy and vision. They were motivated, organized, and united. But the project wasn't moving fast enough, and the enthusiasm that once drove them began to fade.

And then came the words that every leader dreads hearing:

"The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

— Nehemiah 4:10

This is one of the most honest verses in the whole book. The people look at their leader and simply say, "This is never going to work."

rubble trouble, rabble babble



The Rubble

In the context of the Israelites, the word "rubble" describes more than broken stones. It's their internal dialogue, their confidence, and the sense of chaos they must have been experiencing. They weren't just getting tired. They were becoming **weary**.

And when you're weary, every stone feels heavier, every task moves more slowly, and every goal feels further away. Weariness gets inside your head and whispers, "Your effort doesn't matter anymore."

Moving the heavy rubble from the wall was dirty and tiring, but what made things worse were the people jeering at them from the sidelines.

The Rabble

As the people rebuilt, voices from outside (and sometimes even inside) mocked, threatened, and undermined the work. Men like **Sanballat**, **Tobiah**, and **Geshem** weren't just hecklers; they represented regional powers who felt threatened by Jerusalem's revival. Working all day is hard enough; the last thing anyone needed was to be mocked while they were doing it.

But Nehemiah recognized their tactics for what they were: noise meant to create doubt. **Every generation of God's people faces its own "rabble."** The cynics, critics, or spiritual bullies who use fear and mockery to stall renewal.

The Response

In the face of fear and fatigue, Nehemiah doesn't shame the people; he reminds them of the truth: that even though what they were doing was hard, it was worth the effort.

He put their eyes back on God's greatness, not their own weakness. He gave them a reason to keep going, not out of fear of failure, but out of love for what mattered most. Then he did something that might sound strange, but gave them the boost they needed.

Nehemiah reorganized the people so that everyone worked with a weapon in one hand and a tool in the other. It wasn't efficient, but it was practical and symbolic. Every swing of the hammer became an act of worship. Every guard post became a declaration: *"We will not quit, because God is with us."*

Hope for the Weary

Today, when you feel worn down by the brokenness of the world, or the slow pace of change, remember:

- God is not asking for your perfection; He's asking for your perseverance.
- You don't need to have all the answers; you just need to keep showing up.
- The rubble that overwhelms you may be the very material God uses to rebuild something stronger.
- The rabble that mocks you could be the next group of people that you show the love of Jesus to.

Hope isn't pretending the trouble isn't real or ignoring that it's heavy. **Hope is believing that God can build something beautiful out of it.**



reflection questions

- When you feel too tired to keep going, what practices or people help remind you of God's presence?
- What does perseverance look like for you right now?
- What is one small faithful step you can take this week?
- What does it mean for you to "build with one hand and fight with the other"?

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With gratitude,

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thank you.



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